Proceedings of the

CONFERENCE ON LOCAL LANGUAGES IN
EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Limuru, Kenya
22-24 June 2015

Theme:
Empowering Communities through Use of Local Languages in Education and Development Programmes
When people are put at the centre of the development process, issues of language will always be close to the surface.

(Clinton Robinson, 1996)

Sustainable development will not be achieved at the expense of the people of Africa or at the expense of their languages.

(Paulin Djité, 2008)
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- the editors
Executive Summary

This report contains the proceedings of the language advocacy conference organized by SIL Africa’s AAB department and funded by Wycliffe Netherlands. The conference, held between the 23rd and 26th of June 2015 at the Brackenhurst Conference Centre in Limuru, was the first of its kind. The conference brought together organisations implementing development programmes in health, gender, education, peace building and conflict resolution for the three days, and provided a platform for them to engage with the role of local languages in the attainment of their programmes’ goals in ways they had not imagined possible.

The conference centred on the role of local languages in education and development programmes, with specific focus on African languages. The key note address, the plenary session presentations, and the breakout session discussions all engaged with this conference theme. The key note address wrapped up all four sub-themes of the conference together, while bringing out the roles that local languages can play in shaping the development discourse; the three plenary presentations and the World Café session each addressed one specific sub-theme. In addition to the questions raised in response to the keynote and plenary presentations, participants also spent time reflecting on the issues raised during the breakout sessions, where a set of questions were provided to guide their reflections. These too are part of this report. All of this makes this report an invaluable resource in advocating for use of African indigenous languages in education and development programmes.

It is clear from the proceedings that the role of local languages in the attainment of programme goals cannot be ignored. When the ‘languages of power’ (defined by the conference delegates as the local languages) in the beneficiary communities are used, programme ownership and participation is much more likely than when less well-understood languages are used. It also emerges from the discussions that much more can be achieved in development programmes if the messages are packaged in the language(s) of the target communities.

A caution is also given on the double-sided nature of language, especially in relation to gender and women’s empowerment as well as in peace-building and conflict resolution. Language and how it is used is shown to have the power to make or break: used negatively, language can exacerbate inequality and conflict. Used positively, however, language is a readily available resource in peace-building, conflict resolution, women’s empowerment and other development agendas.

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1 The term ‘language of power’ is used here to mean the language spoken and understood by the community (as redefined by the conference delegates), as opposed to the conventional meaning that refers to international languages.
Primary Presenters

Professor Kithaka wa Mberia, PhD, is the Chairman of the Department of Linguistics and Languages, University of Nairobi, where he has been teaching and doing research for the last three decades. He has also taught at Virginia State University, USA as a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, and at the University of Warsaw, Poland, as a Visiting Professor. He has served as an External Examiner for both Kenyan and foreign universities. He has published numerous papers in academic journals in linguistics and literary criticism. He is also a creative writer, with several books of poetry and drama to his credit. These include the Kiswahili works Kifo Kisimani (play), Mchezo wa Karata (poetry), Natala (play), Bara Jingine (poetry), Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi (play), Redio na Mwezi (poetry), Msimu wa Tisa (poetry) and Rangi ya anga (poetry). Some of these books have been translated and published in English as well.

Professor Catherine Ndungo, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Kiswahili and the founder and director of the Institute of African Studies at Kenyatta University. Professor Ndungo has over 32 years of professional experience, including 26 years as a University lecturer in the Kiswahili and Gender Department, which she founded and chaired for 4 years. She is a member of international, regional and national professional bodies, including: the United Bible Society, where she sits in the Committee of Translation Projects; Hand in Hand International; the Organization for Social Science Research for Eastern Africa; the Association of African Women for Research and Development, Kenya Chapter; and the Third World Studies Association. Professor Ndungo has published widely in the areas of gender, women’s participation in politics, oral literature and Kiswahili. Currently she is the chair of the Bible Society of Kenya.

Dr. Janerose Kibaara is an educationalist, researcher, mentor and counsellor with over 18 years of experience in conflict management and resolution, policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation, training and research. Dr. Kibaara holds a PhD in education management from Kenyatta University, a Master’s degree in Education Administration & Planning from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, a Bachelor’s degree in education (arts) from Kenyatta University, and a post-graduate diploma in counselling. She is a member of the International Forum on Women Rights and Development, the Forum for African Women Educationalists-Kenya and the Kenya Counselling and Psychological Association (KCPA).

Dr. Barbara Trudell is the Director of Research and Advocacy for SIL Africa. A citizen of the USA, Barbara has lived and worked for most of her adult life in the global South. She earned her PhD in international education from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Her background includes community-level literacy program facilitation, leadership of country-level literacy program initiatives, capacity-building among literacy consultant trainees, and consulting for agencies such as UNESCO, USAID and DfID. Barbara’s research experience has included studies of: language and education choices in Cameroon; language and reading methodology in Kenya; civil society literacy organizations in Senegal; nonformal education alternatives in Burkina Faso; and local-language literacy acquisition processes in Peru. Recent publications have focused on language, literacy and sustainable development; reading and culture; globalization and education in Africa; community processes of language development; the use of African languages in formal education; and language policy formulation and implementation.
Introduction

Education is a central catalyst for many aspects of development: poverty reduction; nutrition improvement; health and wellbeing; education; gender equality and women’s empowerment; water and energy sustainability; economic growth and decent work; inequality reduction; environmental protection; and peace and the building of inclusive societies.

When learners are able to use a language they speak for processing new information, development outcomes are enhanced. The role of language in the attainment of each of the eight 2015 millennium development goals has been demonstrated (cf. SIL International, 2015). Development outcomes are more readily achieved when life-changing information is communicated in languages that people understand well. The mortality rate for children under five years of age is reduced when vital health information about disease prevention and treatment is available in local languages, while poorly understood health information can lead to dangerous and even fatal misinformation (SIL, 2015).

Studies further show that teaching children in unfamiliar languages can actually set them back. In contrast, a bilingual approach to learning that includes mother tongue as medium of instruction and later introduces a second language improves literacy acquisition and overall school performance (Malone, 2003; Walter & Trammell, 2010). Learners, particularly girls and women, who are educated in languages familiar to them stay in school longer and achieve better results than those who are not taught in a language they understand; this fact has significant implications for the attainment of gender parity in education and women’s empowerment.

Despite these demonstrated links amongst language, education and development, development programs are often conceived and implemented with little or no regard to the possible roles that local languages can play in the attainment of program goals. The objective of this conference was therefore to draw attention to some key issues related to the use of local language in education and development, and to showcase programs that consider the role of local languages in the attainment of their goals, in order to encourage participating organisations to reflect on how they may integrate local African languages into their development initiatives.
The conference was divided into four sub-themes, with presentations and discussions included in each sub-theme:

- The role of local languages in education and development;
- The role of local languages in health, including reproductive health;
- The role of local languages in peace building and conflict resolution;
- The role of local language in attaining gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Participants in the conference represented more than 20 NGOs and CBOs involved in implementation of education and development programs, primarily from Kenyan and Ethiopian ICCO Alliance partners. Overall, 64 delegates from 8 different countries took part in the 3-day conference.

The conference comprised the following sessions:

**Opening plenary and keynote address:** This session clarified the focus of the conference and gave pointers to the expected outcomes of the conference. A broad overview of the different sub-themes and how they tie in with language and development was also provided.

**Four half-day sessions:** Each session addressed one of the sub-themes listed above. In three cases, introductory papers were given by experts in the field, followed by breakout sessions and reporting back of group discussion and conclusions. The other sub-theme, on language and health, was addressed using a World Café approach to large group discussion. A great deal of rich thinking is represented in the various discussion sessions; for that reason, summaries of those discussions are included in this report. In addition, several organizations that are implementing programs relating to the four sub-themes were invited to share how they are using language to achieve their goals.

**Closing plenary:** A wrap-up session at the end of the deliberations solidified the learning and brought coherence to the various discussions that took place over the conference days.

In this conference environment, organizations involved in implementing programs in different aspects of development were able to share experiences and thinking about local languages, in ways they had not done before. The strength and relevance of the papers presented, and the rich
thinking that took place in the discussion sessions, are sure to affect how the participants view local languages as tools for empowering program beneficiaries.
Keynote Address

The place of indigenous languages in African development

Prof. Kithaka wa Mberia, University of Nairobi

1. Introduction

A number of events with a bearing on indigenous languages took place between 1951 and 2006. In 1951, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation’s (UNESCO) group of experts held a meeting. The report of that meeting appeared seven years later in a seminal collection of papers collected and edited by J.A. Fishman titled *The Sociology of Language* (UNESCO, 1968).

In the summary section of the report, the experts observed that:

i) The mother tongue is a person’s natural means of self-expression, and one of his first needs is to develop his power of self-expression;

ii) Every pupil should begin his formal education in his mother tongue;

iii) There is nothing in the structure of any language that precludes it from becoming a vehicle of modern civilization.

Every year, on February 21, the world celebrates the International Mother Language Day. The celebrations are meant to remind us of the importance of mother tongues. The day was proclaimed by the General Conference of the UNESCO in November 1999. In its declaration, the United Nations General Assembly called upon Member States to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world. The day has been observed every year since 2000.

The third event took place in 2000. In that year, writers and scholars from the whole of Africa, including literary heavyweights such as Kenya’s Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Egypt’s Nawal el Saadawi, gathered in Asmara, Eritrea, for an important conference titled, “Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures into the 21st Century”. At the end of the Conference, the participants came up with *The Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures*. The resolutions of the
Declaration urged for the development and use of African indigenous languages in education as well as other domains in society.

The fourth event with a bearing on indigenous African languages took place in 2006. In that year, the African Union Executive Council met in Sudan and, acknowledging the importance of African languages in building and integrating Africa the African, recommended that the African Union declare a special year for revitalising African languages. The African Union Assembly accepted the recommendation and tasked its Commission with the responsibility of coordinating activities to promote the Year of the African Language in collaboration with the UNESCO and other institutions.

When we consider the four events mentioned above, a number of questions come to mind. Among these are:

i) Why do indigenous languages arouse the interest of international bodies such as the UNESCO and the African Union?

ii) What is in indigenous African languages which makes them to attract the attention of Africa’s best minds to an international gathering?

iii) Why does the international community find it worthwhile to designate a day as International Mother Tongue Day?

This paper is geared towards looking for and finding answers to these and similar questions.

2. Indigenous languages and education

Since the colonial days in Africa, language in education has been a pestering issue. Some people, basing their comments on perception rather than facts, have advocated the locking out indigenous African languages from the education system especially their use as media of instruction. They put forward various contentions to try and support their position. They argue, for instance, that indigenous African languages slow down learning. Others claim that since English, French and Portuguese (the languages of the former colonizers) are international languages and are available to us, we do not need to look for local substitutes for the media of instruction.

Some parents, thanks to the massive colonial brainwashing that painted virtually all things African as “backward”, do not see any good reason for their children to be subjected to learning in indigenous languages. Parents are not the only group of Africans who do not see much worth in the
use of mother tongues as media of instruction in the lower levels of formal learning. The perception is shared by other groups such as teachers and unionists.

In the second camp in the mother tongue for media of instruction debate, there are experts in education, psychology and linguistics who argue for the use of indigenous languages in the lower levels of formal education. These experts point at concrete benefits to the child and to the community that come from the use of the child’s mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the early stages of formal education.

Research findings strongly support the view that using mother tongues as media of education in schools is good for learners. In 2007, two researchers in Tanzania investigated the differences of teaching the same topic in English and then in Kiswahili some days later. The experiment involved Form 1 students in six schools. The researchers gathered the data using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The researchers found out that, in every case, the students taught the same topic by the same teacher, performed better when the teaching was conducted in Kiswahili than in English or when code-switching was used. The research demonstrated that students learn better when they are taught in a language in which they are very familiar (Rwantabagu, 2011).

Although the Tanzanian experiment involved secondary school students, the results have implications for the use of mother tongues as media of instruction at the lower levels of formal education. The results showed, as Rwantabagu notes, that an indigenous language does not impede learning. On the contrary, mother tongues facilitate better understanding of the subject matter being taught. This advantage to the learner is even more pronounced among younger learners than the secondary school students used in the Tanzanian experiment.

In Niger, according to Nikiema (2011), German Technical Assistance Agency (GTZ) conducted a comparative assessment of pupils from both experimental and traditional schools. The assessment involved pupils in grades 4, 5 and 6. The assessment was conducted in both the national (indigenous) languages and in French. The pupils scored better in tests conducted in the local languages. The better results were independent of the content of the tests. When pupils were
tested on the French language, there were hardly any differences between the pupils who had used the mother tongue as medium of instruction, (that is, those in experimental schools) and those who had used French (in other words, those in the traditional schools). This was especially so in the final year, indicating that using a local language as the medium of instruction did not disadvantage pupils in their learning of the French language. Similar scores suggested that pupils from the experimental schools were not any weaker in French than those from traditional schools. The tests also established that when a pupil succeeds in an exercise in his/her first language, they succeed in the same type of exercise when it is conducted in French, pointing to a positive transfer of competences from Language 1 (LI) to language 2 (L2).

Supporting the use of indigenous languages in education, Rwantabagu observes that the language factor weighs in heavily as a tool for the appropriate transformation of socio-cultural, political and economic systems of a society. It is through the enrichment of local languages that the majority of the people can be empowered by accessing information in domains such as health, agriculture and environmental protection (Rwantabagu, 2011).

Contributing to a debate sparked by a circular on the use of mother tongues as the media of instruction in Kenyan schools, Joseph Othieno published a very informative article in a local daily. He observed that, in education, pupils perform better when the language of instruction is familiar to them because it improves the quantity and quality of information transmission (Othieno, 2014). He gives, as an example, a case in Burkina Faso which, he says, was published and widely disseminated by the World Bank with a view to stressing the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge in all development programmes in the Third World. Alarmed by the high levels of illiteracy in the Nomgana community, a non-governmental organization, in collaboration with the Government and a university professor, developed a primary school curriculum in Mooré, the local language. Primary school children were taught school subjects in Mooré rather than in French. Indeed, Mooré was also used as the medium of instruction for French. As it turned out, pupils taught in Mooré performed better in the standardised examinations than those who were taught in French in the conventional curriculum.

The study indicates that using Mooré as the medium of instruction was exceptionally beneficial to the children. Not only did they perform better in the examinations but they also completed their
syllabus in four years instead of the conventional six years. Particularly interesting, the pupils using Mooré as the medium of instruction developed better skills in the French language than their counterparts who had used French as the medium of instruction (Othieno, 2014).

3. Indigenous languages and health
Performing arts in indigenous languages can be used for the betterment of health in African populations. Genres of art that can be used to great advantage in improving health include drama, story-telling, dramatized and recited poetry, and puppetry. These art forms can be used to campaign against illnesses such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and kwashiorkor.

Arts can also be used to impress on the women the importance of delivering in hospitals and health centres so as to benefit from the institutions’ clean environment, sterilized equipment and the knowhow of the nurses. Furthermore, artistic performances can demonstrate the wisdom of post-natal visits to hospitals and health centres for check-ups on babies to minimize the possibility of early deaths. Malaria is one of the most lethal diseases in the world especially in Africa where it kills millions of children every year. The disease is caused by protozoa-carrying female anopheles mosquito. For there to be the protozoa-carrying anopheles mosquito, there must be mosquito-breeding areas, notably, stagnant water in ponds, marshy grounds or large water containing vessels such as large open drums. By eradicating mosquito-breeding facilities, the population of the insects can be brought down considerably if not eradicated altogether. The new reality would lead to reduced suffering and deaths from malaria. As a consequence, the population would be productive economically.

Using performing arts in local languages, it is possible to drive the point home that individuals in a home or residents in a particular area can bring down the number of mosquitoes by destroying their breeding environment by clearing grass and bushes near houses, emptying water from large containers, draining stagnant water, and spraying marshy grounds. Performing arts can also be used to educate rural women on the need to attend pre-natal clinics for the evaluation of their pregnancy so as to pre-empt or correct pregnancy complications. For drama, players can use conventional theatre complete with well scripted plays or skits. The scripts written in (or translated)
into indigenous languages would have to use local idiom and local social experiences so as to connect with the local audiences.

Besides scripted drama, players can also use improvised plays. The appeal of improvised drama has been demonstrated by street artists in Nairobi. Nyengese’s group, which pulled crowds on the streets of Nairobi a few years ago, provides a good example of the power of improvisation in theatre. The late Nyengese and his co-actors would appear on a Nairobi street dressed in comical costumes and start their improvised act. Some of them would be costumed like men while others would wear women’s costumes with exaggerated derrieres. They would choose a location on a street and start their act. Within a short while, they would be surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd. In turn, the presence of the crowd would arouse the curiosity of passers-by who would also join the crowd to find out why people were gathered. The bigger the crowds became the more motivated the actors would be. They would give the performance their all. The keen crowds, characterized by enthusiasm and keenness, would be engulfed in laughter as they imbibed the social commentary delivered by the artist.

There are potential actors and actresses in every village, marketplace and city slum. Members of the local communities, especially the youth, can be trained in basic theatre skills so that they perform, in the local languages, plays and skits with health messages. Reaching out to local populations using local talent and local idiom would be a sure way of striking the right chord in the hearts of the target audiences. The newly found skills of the local artists can be effectively used to campaign against harmful environment and risky lifestyles.

The local theatre troupes need not worry much whether or not their localities have social halls in which to perform. With good public relations, the troupes can get permission to use churches premises, mosque compounds and school halls and classrooms when such facilities are free. Moreover, the local players can utilize open spaces such as football fields, market-squires and school playgrounds.

In an article titled “Indigenous Languages, Performing Arts and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic” (Wa Mberia, 2009), I have argued that, besides drama, local performing artists can use narratives with the HIV/AIDS themes. With proper coaching, the narrators can learn to use good pronunciation,
clear enunciation, powerful voice projection, effective eye-contact, strong stage presence and credible stage movement to effectively communicate important messages on health using indigenous languages.

Poetry is another art form which can be used effectively to combat habits that lead to morbidity and mortality. Poems in indigenous languages can be recited, chanted, sang or dramatized. Besides other compositional devices, such poems could use powerful metaphors, memorable similes, emotive imagery, strong symbolism and locally recognizable allusions. Moreover, the poems could be reinforced with local proverbs, sayings and other forms of communal wisdom.

Songs and music are other art forms that we can use in campaigns against illnesses. Traditionally, songs in Africa played a very important role in educating individuals and whole communities. They did this by praising people with positive traits, admonishing wayward characters and social misfits, and warning potential wrongdoers. Moreover, they ridiculed foolish behaviour and gave accolades to the wise men and women in society. They can still play an important role in the areas of health. Singers in the villages, churches and school choirs, singing in indigenous languages can be brought on board to pass across messages on how to prevent diseases and how to respond responsively when people fall sick. Songs could, for instance, show the vanity of an HIV/positive person or an Ebola patient going to a traditional healer.

4. Indigenous languages, conflict, conflict resolution and peace

With regard to conflict, indigenous African languages are a double-bladed sword. There are instances when in a language, there exists a proverb, a song, a story or a myth that paints another community or other communities in negative light. A community (call it Community A) may portray another community (Community B) as a collection of cowards, fools or people who should not be trusted. People in Community A will not have much respect for the members of Community B. If the members of Community B are aware that Community A despises them, they will pay them in kind. There will, therefore, be mutual disrespect. Such a situation is potentially a fertile ground for conflict.

Another possible scenario, for the purpose of illustration, is where in a community’s language there is a proverb, a song, a story or a myth that claims that God created cattle only for the community
and that, all the cattle in the world belong to the community and that any other community that has cattle must have stolen them. Such a community will raid another community’s cattle with a clean conscience under the misguided view that they are simply restoring their animals to themselves. Since such a raid will be met with resistance or a counter-raid where life may be lost and property destroyed, we can say that the language that has the misleading myth is the cause of the conflict.

I pointed out above that we are dealing with a double-bladed sword. Whereas African languages can be the cause for conflict, quite often, they are used for conflict prevention and conflict resolution. In the villages, there are arbitration sessions that either pre-empt potential disputes or resolve existing conflicts. Such sessions often use wisdom extracted from the local language(s). For example, after the disputed 2007 General Election in Kenya, the country degenerated into chaos. There were killings based on ethnic/political affiliations. The situation was so dire that more than a thousand people lost their lives. It looked as though the country was on the way to a civil war. Alarmed, various people tried different methods of cooling down the tempers. One method that was contemplated was using indigenous languages to persuade the speakers of the languages to refrain from violence. The logic underlying this approach is that indigenous languages enjoy an emotive dimension with their speakers that other languages do not have.

Today, “Ubuntu”, a notion and a worldview that holds that one’s existence is only feasible on account of the existence of others and, consequently, demands love, respect and just treatment for others, is an aspect of African Bantu languages, (Mapadimeng, 2009; Mapadimeng and Oppenheim, 2012; Wa Mberia, 2015). Without Mandela’s exposure and belief in “Ubuntu” and its tenets of love, respect and forgiveness, perhaps South Africa would have exploded into flames after the transition from apartheid to democracy. After the transition in 1994, the world waited with abated breath. The world feared for the worst which, fortunately, under Mandela’s stewardship, did not come to pass. It is not too far-fetched to hypothesise, therefore, that “Ubuntu” played a role in the peaceful transition in the new nation.

We could do well to conduct systematic surveys on indigenous languages to record their negative and positive attributes with regard to conflict and peace. Armed with the appropriate information, we can develop programmes or strategies to counter those language aspects that have the potential to create conflict and enhance the aspects that are useful in conflict resolution and peace
maintenance. Conversely, we could promote conflict shunning and peace oriented concepts such as “Ubuntu”.

5. Indigenous languages and gender relations

In Article 10 of the Asmara Declaration on African Languages and Literatures (Asmara Conference Organisers, 2000), African writers and scholars stated that African languages, like all languages, contain gender bias. They added that the role of languages in development must overcome this gender bias and achieve equality.

The existence of gender biases in African languages as noted by the African writers and scholars is an impediment to development. The biases are in the form of girl/women-demeaning proverbs, sayings, narratives and songs. Some aspects of oral literature portray girls and women as cowards, weaklings, undependable, lacking in leadership qualities, and as needing men’s support even in mundane endeavours. As they grow up, as they are socialized, boys pick up and internalize the biases and prejudices against girls and women. Matters are not helped by the fact that girls too are brainwashed into seeing the biases and prejudices as normal. Just like the boys, they internalize the misconceptions about girls and, when they grow up, many women still take mistreatment as culturally admissible and, therefore, something normal.

When boys become men, their prejudices towards women become an impediment to the latter’s political, social and economic wellbeing. That partly explains the limited number of women in senior elective political positions. Because of their prejudices, many men do not take women candidacy seriously. Moreover, many women do not offer themselves for election into hotly contested positions. Many do not think that they are equal to tasks. There is need, therefore, to reverse the tilted balance of power between men and women. One way to wage the battle is to confront gender biases in our languages. This can be done by coming up with policies that bar people – both men and women – from using expressions that paint women in negative light. Such policies, especially when accompanied by carefully designed women advancement programmes, can go a long way in advancing the status of women in Africa.

6. Conclusion
I hope to have demonstrated that indigenous languages can and should be used as vehicles of African development. Whereas they are an important part of the definition of who we are culturally, they are also important economically. They, indeed, can also be used to produce better individuals through their use as media of instruction as well as contribute greatly to the achievement of our developmental goals. Thus, we should see them for what they are: an important resource for Africa. Consequently, there is need to manage them just as we do other resources. Such management should aim to preserve, promote and modernise them as well as assign them new roles in society alongside the traditional ones. That way, we shall be putting into action locally available agents for the improvement of Africa.
Sub-theme 1: Local languages in education and development

Introductory paper

Language, education and development in Africa: Setting the stage

Dr. Barbara Trudell, Director of Research and Advocacy, SIL Africa

This conference on the role of local languages in education and development is built around two major points:

- Education and development are closely linked.
- Language choice influences the success of education and development initiatives.

The intent of this paper is to set the stage for this conference by elaborating on these two points, and providing a closer examination of the connections between language, education and development in the African context.

1. Understandings of ‘development’

The term ‘development’ has been interpreted in various ways over the years (Trudell 2009; Trudell 2012). At least for Africa, the idea came with the colonial contact between Europeans and African societies. Davidson (1969:27) notes that it began in the 19th century, with the European perception that African societies were exotic and had no history of their own:

*Presented without history, as living in a perpetual vacuum of experience, these strange peoples came to seem the denizens of a Garden of Eden left over from the remote past. Logically enough, they began to be called ‘the undeveloped peoples’. For development supposes history, and they were said to have none.*

From the start, then, the term ‘development’ has carried strong deficit connotations, serving as a constant reminder to colonized peoples of ‘what they are not’.

Of course, there has also been a benevolent side to the desire to provide assistance to the ‘underdeveloped’. From the earliest colonial days, humanitarian individuals and agencies from the
North have carried out initiatives to address the educational, economic and health-related deficiencies they have identified on the African continent—motivated by compassion and even some sense of moral obligation. The origins of many prestigious educational and medical facilities across the continent can be traced to such activities. Today, similar initiatives may focus on current perceived needs such as HIV/AIDS care, the building of schools, and local community water or husbandry projects. Although assumptions regarding African ‘underdevelopment’ have remained critically unexamined among these individuals and agencies, the compassionate motivations underlying many of their activities are nevertheless undeniable.

Following World War II, largely due to the post-war American agenda for global change, government understandings of development took on an economic focus. Economic development became the way the global North conceptualized development assistance to the global South, with the criteria for development determined by the donors. As Esteva et al (2013:6) note, this approach instantly made two billion people around the world “underdeveloped”. Economic and technological considerations came to the forefront of the development discourse; the establishment of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as ‘development’ institutions cemented an economic view of development that has dominated the development discourse ever since. The World Bank’s annual report, World Development Report, first issued in 1978, articulates this view of development as shaped by economic indicators and reforms. This perspective does not totally ignore human well-being, but development problems and solutions are still described in largely economic terms.

This approach to development has been contested over the last 30 years. The work of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in particular has disputed the hegemony of economic parameters of development. The United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP’s) first Human Development Report, published in 1990, argued that:

> Technical considerations of the means to achieve human development - and the use of statistical aggregates to measure national income and its growth – have at times obscured the fact that the primary objective of development is to benefit people (UNDP, 1990:9).

The UNDP report stated that average national income is an inadequate proxy measurement for human well-being, since 1) income is a means and not an end, and 2) high human development and
The formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 highlighted even broader criteria for development, including gender equality, poverty and hunger, primary education, child mortality and maternal health, control of disease, environmental sustainability and global partnerships for development (United Nations Development Group 2003:3-4). The World Bank and the large bilateral agencies now describe their contribution to world development in terms of the MDGs, and they use phrases such as poverty reduction, environmental assistance, sustainable development and humanitarian assistance.

Yet a different perspective on development has been formulated, which explores the less measurable aspects of development. Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen is one of the major proponents of this perspective, which focuses on development as “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen 1999:3). Sen argues that the goal of development should be the expansion of human freedom, and the removal of whatever obstacles to it exist.

The capability approach to development has grown out of this perspective. The argument of this approach is that poverty is more about the deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than just about low income. The capability approach focuses on people as ends in themselves, rather than treating people merely as means to economic activity. The notion of human agency is central to this approach: the ability to act and to bring about desired change in one’s own life (Sen 1999:19). Agency is seen as a key component of real human development.

2. The development/language link
No matter which of these approaches to development is used, language choice is central to the success or failure of development initiatives. This can be seen in several ways:

2.1. The formulation of development strategies, if they are to include reference to the felt needs of the target population, must be carried out in a language the people understand well. Development
experts may have a very limited understanding of the cultural context, reasoning that the technical content they bring is what matters, rather than the language or culture of the target population. However those who are the targets of development initiatives often hold alternative ideas about their ‘development’ that may clash with the dominant modernization and economic productivity paradigms of most international donors and project implementers (Hodgson 2011:7). If the formulation of effective, sustainable development strategies is to include those alternative ideas, the target population must be allowed to use their own language in the negotiation.

2.2. The populations most often targeted by development efforts include rural populations, which are the populations most likely to rely on non-official languages for learning and communication. The demographics and socioeconomic status of those targeted for development initiatives should influence language choices towards those that are spoken and understood by the learners. Development efforts that aim at learning or behaviour change MUST be communicated in the language of the audience.

2.3. The most economically and politically marginalized peoples tend also to be the most linguistically marginalized. May (2004: 37) has noted that it is no coincidence that the world’s endangered languages are spoken by the politically least influential peoples. Relying on the official or international ‘language of power’ in delivering development initiatives only entrenches this linguistic and social power imbalance, at the same time diminishing the impact of the project.

2.4. Sustainable economic and social development is also dependent on use of the appropriate language. As Djité (2008) has noted, the informal economy in Africa is growing. The languages that support this dynamic informal sector are the languages spoken by the customers; thus, across Africa informal business transactions take place overwhelmingly in African languages. There are more than 2,100 living languages in Africa today, and nearly 1,100 of them are in regular and vigorous use. Clearly, fostering the informal sector of the economy in Africa requires paying attention to the languages being used.

The key components of human-centred development are communication, learning and critical thinking on the part of the target population. The effectiveness of all of these components is
strongly influenced by language choice. Development that is both sustainable and human-centred is simply not possible if carried out in a language the people do not speak.

3. **Language and education quality: Issues and opportunities**
Regardless of whether language is mentioned explicitly in international goals and targets, it plays a crucial role in education outcomes. The Education for All goals of 2000-2015 emphasize both access and quality of education, and both are dependent on language choice (among other features of education). Local languages have a role in access to education, since they allow learners to understand what’s being taught, as well as quality education, since they lead to better retention and learning. The proposed Sustainable Development Goal for education, intended to be met by 2030, aims at “inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning for all.” This goal has serious implications for minority language communities, who are politically marginalized and economically struggling, and whose education needs are mostly ignored.

Early grade reading assessments being conducted across Africa are also providing evidence that is relevant to language of instruction. The findings indicate that children are not reading anywhere near at grade level, and that they are being taught to “read” in languages they don’t understand. There is a connection! Real learning requires reflection and assimilation of new knowledge, not just memorization. This can only take place when the child understands the language of instruction. And yet, millions of African children entering grade 1 do not understand the language of the classroom. By grade 5 many are still struggling with the language of instruction. The resulting ‘education’ is not inclusive or of good quality, because learning cannot take place in this environment of non-understanding.

Thus, the issue arises of how well children are able to speak the language of the classroom in a given situation. Through study of language acquisition processes, scholars have identified a distinction between ‘basic interpersonal communicative skills’ (BICS) and ‘cognitive academic language proficiency’ (CALP; Cummins 2000). Children may be able to use a non-mother tongue to converse in play with their peers, but they need much more time to become academically proficient in that language. Conversational proficiency usually happens within two years, but five to seven years are required for academic proficiency (Cummins 2000:58). Thus, the length of time
necessary to acquire academic language proficiency has significant implications for the time allocation of languages in the school day (Trudell, Young and Nyaga 2015).

Of all the curriculum subjects, language proficiency is probably most crucial in learning to read. Reading and writing are based on comprehension of written text. Reading, essentially, is making meaning from text. More than any other subject, learning to read requires that the pupils understand the language being used. Memorization of words, syllables and letters is not reading if comprehension of the language of the text is missing.

4. Challenges to local language-medium education programs

Even though both research and classroom practice indicate that using the child’s own language for learning is central to successful learning, a number of significant challenges exist.

*The prestige of international languages:* Parents, teachers and students alike continue to believe the myth that school learning is ‘outside’ knowledge and should not be taught in a local language. This presents a significant implementation challenge even to pro-mother tongue language policies.

*Language politics:* National policy for language use in formal education can be negative, permissive or actively supportive of local language use. However, as noted above, the policy alone does not guarantee that it will be locally adhered to. What parents, teachers and headmasters decide to do has an enormous impact on classroom language practices.

Stakeholders’ beliefs about language, ethnicity and national unity are significant political determiners of policy formulation and implementation in the classroom. The question of whether national unity requires linguistic uniformity engenders quite a bit of debate in certain African countries with national policies often reflecting those perspectives.

*Language-related challenges:* Using local languages as media of instruction requires that the written forms of those languages have been developed. Specific requirements include an established alphabet, the establishment of local-language vocabulary for teaching content subjects in the language, the ability of teachers to read and write in the language, and the existence of adequate materials written in the language to use in the classroom. All of these challenges can be
successfully met through language development activities; but where they have not yet been resolved, attention to them is necessary.

Money: Is money an obstacle to local language-medium education? Concerns about the supposed additional cost of local-language education feature prominently in the objections to adopting this model. However these concerns are based on inadequate understanding of the realities of language, pedagogy and finances.

The reality is that good quality education costs more than bad-quality education, regardless of the language used. So the resourcing gap between international language-medium education and African language-medium education is not primarily about language choice: the resourcing gap is actually about the difference between good quality education and poor quality education. It is true that the use of local languages for classroom instruction requires development of a range of pedagogical materials, for both student and teacher; provision of these materials to classrooms across the nation, including the most rural ones; teacher capacity development and supervision; and possibly curriculum review. However, all of these are elements of any good-quality education system. Experience has shown that development of materials in several languages does not cost a great deal more; and compared to the cost of school failure and high dropout rates because the learners don’t understand the language the teacher is using, using local languages actually represents a long-term financial savings.

5. Progress
Despite these and other challenges, attention to the use of local languages as media of instruction and actual implementation are increasing. National language policies are increasingly recognizing African languages: a recent review of language policy in 21 countries of Eastern and Southern Africa reveals that 90% of those countries have included African languages in their curriculum policies. International education donors are also recognizing the value of local-language medium education for successful learning outcomes in African primary school classrooms. A range of current education projects are demonstrating that local-language medium education helps achieve quality learning, including projects in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Ghana.
Parents are also recognizing, to some extent, that the poor quality education their children are receiving is not a good value, since it costs them money and their children do not succeed. In countries such as Burkina Faso and Mozambique, parents are seeking out mother tongue-medium primary school programs for their children.

Attention is also being given to the development and reform of alphabets in African languages, including efforts by international NGOs and intergovernmental agencies such as the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN). These efforts result in languages that are easier to learn to read and write. Entertaining and age-appropriate materials in African languages are also being developed, due to the efforts of agencies such as World Vision, Room to Read, Project for Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA), Molteno, SIL and the African Storybook Project.

6. Conclusion
In conclusion, two points may be made regarding language, learning and development.

*Sustainable development requires inclusive, equitable, quality education.* Development and learning are inextricably linked. The days are past when development interventions from ‘the outside’ could be imposed on African communities without the involvement of those communities. Effective change requires learning that is inclusive, equitable, and of good quality.

*Inclusive, equitable, quality education is only possible when the learner understands the language of instruction.* Again, the days are surely past when African citizens, whether adults or children, could legitimately be expected to learn well in a language they do not understand. Challenges do exist to the implementation of pro-local language policy in education and development programs; but all of them have been shown to be resolvable, and Africa’s citizens deserve no less.

*Break out session: questions and feedback*

1. Discuss these 2 statements:
“*Education and sustainable development are closely linked.*”
There was a general consensus that that education and development are indeed closely linked.
• Education can be viewed as an investment that will eventually help the graduate find gainful employment. Once one acquires basic education, it gives a foundation upon which one can continue learning new things in the future.

• Education is a tool for defending one’s rights. Education helps in the empowerment of communities to advocate for their rights, since they are able to understand those rights.

• Education also leads to attitude change, which is important to development. Education changes the way people perceive their surroundings and available opportunities, and allows them to make informed decisions about their lives.

However, in order to have this impact, education should be localized and contextualized, including the use of the language of the community. This will help people to make informed decisions as they acquire new capacities, knowledge and attitudes. In this way, the entire society can be transformed.

“Language choice influences the success of education and development initiatives.”

Language choice affects education and development initiatives in many ways. The choice of language will influence the ability of the learner to acquire new knowledge, including the knowledge needed to be global citizens. The choice of language of instruction should be such that it helps learners not only to understand what they are being taught, but also to develop competencies that will make them good global citizens. Involving local communities in the choice of language and educational material development is very important.

Language choice can either make concepts abstract and difficult to understand (when the learner has not mastered the language of instruction), or it can make concepts simple and relevant to the learner’s daily experiences (when the learner speaks the language of instruction), thus, enhancing learning.

Several participating organizations cited cases in which using the local language enhances their development agenda:

• Speaking the language of the host community during community meetings is helpful in enhancing understanding.
• The creation of reading materials in local languages has changed the communities’ attitude towards development and education interventions.

• The local language can be used to address retrogressive cultural practices, or issues such as deforestation or maltreatment of the elderly in the community.

• In Kenya, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission prepared materials in English as well as in some local languages. It was reported that the materials in local languages were used more than those in English.

• Advertising development resources in a local language has resulted in more sales than advertising the same products in the language of wider communication.

• In the election campaigns in Kenya, it was reported that those people who were able to communicate effectively in the language of the voting community in most cases were elected, since they were able to connect with the voters better than their counterparts who did not speak a language that the voters understood.

• A delegate from Ethiopia shared an experience in which an Oromo boy was examined in Amharic. Since he did not understand the questions, he was punished for failing to express himself in Amharic. He dropped out of school never to go back.

• In Burkina Faso, adult literacy carried out in local languages increased productivity in the rural communities.

A caution from the participants, though, was that in mixed communities, when one community uses a language that other communities do not understand, this has the potential to cause division.

2. How are language choices represented in the goals and strategies of your project? If they are not represented well, how could this be changed?

The general consensus of the group was that it is important to get the right person, who understands the local language, to carry out the development agenda in a given context.

• One project that was targeting Borana people also gave attention to other language groups in the area by carrying out a language survey. This ensured that the project would be more inclusive than just attending to one language community.

• Another group said that speaking in the local language makes the implementer part of the community, and ensures that the project that he or she brings is received well.
• A team delivery approach is used during community interactions, so that development partners are able to interact with the community in a language the community understands.

• One organization has a policy on grassroots staff, that they must understand the local culture and language; this enables them to lead the organization’s community-based efforts. They have also developed reading materials in local languages to boost reading competencies in schools.

• In Ethiopia, women groups are much more popular when they are able to use the local language for the written materials involved.

3. What is the ‘language of power’ in your project? Does using the language of power affect the ability of your project beneficiaries to participate well in the program? If so, how?

It became evident that there are two ways to understand the idea of “language of power”. It can be seen as an international language, the language of wider society, government, and so on; or, it can be seen as the language that has prestige and currency in the community and through which communities get things done. The participants looked at the language of power as the local language, in which business is done.

In addressing the question of how this language of power can be used to transform communities, delegates were of the view that the language of power facilitates personal acceptance in the society. They also observed that training teachers in local languages in Ethiopia results in more enthusiastic learners.

It was also generally agreed that translation of materials from a foreign language into the local language does not bring out the meaning as clearly as when a local person who understands the language explains the material to the audience. When the local language is used, it gives the community opportunity to share what they have rather than only receiving, and it creates a bond between the community and the agency that is working to empower the community.

4. Do you agree with this statement? “School learning is ‘outside knowledge’; it should not be taught in a local language.”
The group wrestled with this question. Those who agreed with the statement brought up the issues that most parents will ask on the importance of use of local languages, such as:

- How can complex, foreign content be taught in a local language that may not have sufficient vocabulary?
- Education must address issues beyond the local context, so a local language is not appropriate.
- Knowledge acquired in school is set in an outside culture; we must, therefore, learn it in that culture to be able to understand it.

Those who did not agree with the statement noted the following:

- Learning is better served when one teaches from the known to the unknown. Since local issues and language will reinforce learning, we must be able to at least begin formal education with local languages; using examples drawn from the local environment helps the learners understand the foreign concepts that are brought by education.
- Language is a custodian of culture. Culture is a repository of the identity of a people. It therefore follows that children should be taught in their local languages, so that they can grow in their self-awareness; this will help them to understand others in multi-cultural contexts once they understand themselves better.
- All languages, including the local languages, are means of promoting global interactions. It follows then that children need to be taught in their languages to be able to be better communicators in their own language, and to use this richness in communicating in foreign languages. For example people can quote idioms and other sayings in their languages, translate them in foreign languages as they use their own language richness to communicate their viewpoints to others.
- We use local languages to refine knowledge and to ensure that learning becomes a continual process in which we are learning new things and thus promoting innovation and improvement in our society.

Another interesting point was that bad education is simply bad education, regardless of the language in which it is being provided. If there are no teaching/learning materials, not enough
Teachers and poor learning environment, language of instruction choices cannot make up for that.

Examples from Burkina Faso and Ethiopia indicated that when the mother tongue for teaching and learning has been used, better results have been achieved as opposed to when languages of wider communication were used. One participant noted that in Burkina Faso, everything being learned is common to all cultures today; the only difference is the language of instruction. Another Ethiopian participant noted that children even as late as grade 9 may struggle with second language-medium learning; however, children educated for 8 years in local language perform better in English than those taught in that language.
Sub-theme 2: The role of local languages in health and well-being

World café

The Role of Local Language in Health and Well Being

The conference used a World Café facilitation method to discuss the role of language in health and well-being. World Café is an easy-to-use method for creating collaborative dialogue around questions that matter to a community, nation or specific interest group. It emphasizes the power of natural conversations in dealing with what sometimes are a group’s or a community’s most difficult issues. Its biggest strength lies in the way it allows people to freely express themselves in a socially conducive environment. The result of the interactions is a rich exchange of knowledge and valuable experience. Participants learn from each other in a non-threatening manner, and pick up new ways of handling problems that are similar to those that others have had.

This method is a natural one in the African context. Communities in Africa are well known for being ‘oral’ cultures. The rich knowledge embedded in African culture used to be passed down from elders to young ones through evening ‘storying times’, often over a meal. This learning could have taken place around a fireplace in Kenya, or around the ‘coffee-drinking ceremony’ in Ethiopia, for example. The informal setting of such learning made an excellent context for sharing the insights of the community. In Western contexts, a coffee date or informal meeting can also produce significant results, even in very subtle ways.

The World Café method for hosting large-group dialogue has five central components:

- Creation of an environment, such as a café environment, in which small groups of people will be able to talk comfortably.
- Introduction of the World Café process, and setting the context for the dialogues.
- Beginning the process with a round of conversation among each of the small groups; after a set time, each member of the group moves to a different small table (except for the group leaders, who stay at their tables).
• For each round, the conversation at each table is guided by a question posed to the entire group.
• After several rounds of conversation, individuals are invited to share insights or results from their conversations with the rest of the large group.
• The ideas arising from the conversations are summarized in a simple diagram

The conference organizers used this method of facilitation to talk about the role languages play, as communities and governments address issues of health and well-being. Tables were set where coffee and tea was served, creating an informal and friendly atmosphere. Group leaders were carefully selected to provide a facilitative role on different issues.

Participants were given instructions on when to rotate and how to respectfully and creatively make their contributions. The session leaders encouraged a free flow of ideas on how issues such as: how language plays a role in communicating HIV/AIDS messages; how we can use language to promote community hygiene and nutrition; the role of local languages in preventing communicable diseases; the role of local languages in child care practice including immunization; the role of local languages in packaging reproductive health messages including family planning; and the dangers of using languages that are not well understood in talking through health issues.

At the end of the conversations every participant, with the exception of group leaders who could not rotate, had had an opportunity to creatively think through the issues raised, learn from others while at the same time contributing their ideas on the issues at hand. The process resulted in a wealth of documented knowledge that was shared broadly by the groups in a synthesized way at the end of the sessions. Extensive knowledge and ideas were shared at the end, and many of them are captured in the section below.
**Break out session: questions and feedback**

1. **What is the role of local language in packaging reproductive health messages, including family planning?**

   Recognizing the role that local languages can play in communicating reproductive health information could help improve program quality and impact. For instance, when content is well packaged, using local languages and in a culturally sensitive way, it can facilitate clarity and practical application of ideas and promote critical thinking and uptake of behaviour change. Participation will be enhanced since people will understand the information well in their context and will, in turn, discuss, teach or share it with others including family members.

   As a result of using local language based content, trust between the different players and the community could be enhanced, and the use of local knowledge in finding solutions to reproductive health problems could be stimulated. Due to increased understanding and involvement, the community will be empowered to act and will be able to pass on the knowledge they acquire, hence contributing in finding sustainable solutions to community health problems. Further, the use of local languages in reproductive health programs can promote literacy. By interacting with information and content in their local languages, the learners not only acquire vital information but their reading skills could also be enhanced; this will lead to growth in the communities’ knowledge base and their functional literacy skills as well.

   Local languages have words, sayings, expressions and tones that are unique to them and which convey deeper meanings in a way that the languages of wider communication cannot. Local languages bring about an emotional connection with the audience, hence, facilitating the quick acquisition of information and promoting engagement in the discussion at hand.

   Local languages can facilitate discussions on very sensitive messages or discussions considered taboo, especially talking about sexual matters with people that are not of the same age group and gender. Through the use of songs, stories, folktales, riddles, skits and drama, and traditional ceremonies, it becomes possible to simplify messages to the level that even those with no education at all can understand, while at the same time transcending the age barriers that inhibit free discussions on taboo subjects. Through use of local languages, it will be possible to choose
correct words and language while packaging information, education and communication materials on reproductive health hence preventing the dissemination of wrong information. New words in the local language could be created where no equivalent words are available in the local language, hence enriching the local language.

2. What are the risks that can be associated with packaging health information (e.g. HIV/AIDS information, community hygiene messages, child care practices, immunization, RH info, communicable diseases prevention etc.) in a language not understood by majority of the target population?

In the health programs being implemented, language is perhaps the least mentioned yet most powerful tool in providing information on prevention, treatment, care and support to target populations. More often, health messages disseminated even to marginalized, rural populations which do not use other languages have been communicated in languages of wider communication. The result of this has been lack of understanding of those messages by the would-be recipients, and lack of ownership of projects, leading to failure of projects and a reversion to traditional and less effective treatment and health management systems.

Also, due to language barriers, it becomes difficult for local populations to access services. Those who are lucky to access such services may not be able to adequately utilize this information or the products received. An example of this is a person seeing a health worker who does not speak his/her language. The patient may have a problem explaining his or her condition and in return he or she may be given wrong diagnosis and treatment. The patient also may not be able to read instructions on the drugs prescribed, leading to under- or overdose. The result of this could be death, especially in children. The impact of these programs could have been better and greater if local languages, which the local populations understand better, had been used in information, education and communication materials and in tailoring of appropriate messages.

Another problem that arises when someone from outside the community uses an unfamiliar language to pass on health information, especially in reproductive health, is lack of understanding of the local community values. In some communities, for instance, sexual issues are taboo and should not be discussed in mixed groups. An outsider without this understanding and who is using an unfamiliar language might end up doing more harm than good.
Again due to use of unfamiliar languages, it is possible that information can be distorted either through bad translation of what the speaker is saying. Bad relationships between the program implementers and target communities could arise if programs are not done well and are not achieving their objectives. The communities could end up losing interest in the program, and negative effects could result (especially in the case of HIV/AIDS). The reputation of the implementing organizing could also be compromised and their motives questioned.

Also, if unfamiliar languages are used in passing on health information, it is easy for unscrupulous people to take advantage of the community. This could include providing false information or poor service, e.g. treatment by unqualified people. This could further lead to social injustices and discrimination against these communities. In the end, the goal of preventing diseases that are preventable might not be achieved.

In promotion of health and wellbeing in some African communities, there exist myths and practices such as wife inheritance or sharing sharp tools in initiation ceremonies among age mates that could predispose the concerned persons to health risks such as contraction of HIV and other communicable diseases. Local languages use could be useful in breaking some of these myths and practices. By using the language in which they were created, the myths and retrogressive practices can be confronted and proper and accurate information passed on instead.

3. What is the role of local language in child care practices including immunization?

Even before a child is born, the mother communicates to that child in her language, so the child develops and bonds with the mother through the use of the language spoken to it. As the child grows, the parents will be speaking to him/her mostly in a local language and the child will pick up various aspects of the language and vocabulary. As the child grows, he or she learns, plays, is told stories and is socialized using the local language which is understood best. The child’s cognitive, psychological, social and emotional development is facilitated through the use of the local language. As the child proceeds to school, he or she will understand better and will develop critical thinking skills faster if the language that has been learnt from birth is used.
Parents and the community will also benefit more and participate better in child care if they understood information passed on to them in a language that they are most familiar with. Information, education and communication on prenatal care, child immunization, nutrition, hygiene and even treatment can be well understood when the local language is used. This will in turn lead to better child and community health, thus, enhancing community dialogue and innovation on child care issues. As a result of all these, the community will feel a greater sense of involvement and ownership in the project and the overall health of the community will improve.

If local languages are used through different methods and media in promoting child care practices, then information will reach a big percentage of people within the community. In case the information is intended for a certain target group, it is possible to package the information for this group in a way that is appropriate. This could be, for instance, through use of a coded language which is common with most African communities.

4. What is the role of local language in promoting community hygiene and nutrition?

As in other health areas, local languages can play an important role in promotion of community hygiene and nutrition. By simplifying messages and information, the community will better understand hygiene and nutrition messages and will be empowered to make informed choices related to the issues addressed. By using local examples and contexts, the information given will be more concrete and the community will be able to critically examine hygiene and nutrition issues while bringing their experiences and knowledge on board. They can do so easily if they use the local language since this is the language they understand best and through which they can best express themselves. Local language also facilitates easy communication between the health practitioners and the community hence making implementation of programmes easy and friendly. Through increased participation in dialogue and in implementation of programme activities, literacy in hygiene and nutrition could be increased. With improved literacy, it will be easy for the community to practice and replicate best practices hence creating avenues for the programme to be sustainable.

5. What is the role of local language in prevention of communicable diseases?

Communicable diseases can be easily prevented, managed and treated if proper and accurate information is provided in a language that is understood by the target community. This information
if disseminated by trained health workers who speak the local language and who are aware of the
culture of the community will lead to better results in programmes being implemented. Better
understanding of information on communicable diseases might enhance participation and
ownership of the information and programme by the community. The community will be
empowered as a result and will be challenged to change behaviour and attitudes towards these
diseases and people suffering from them. Also, as a result of better understanding of information,
misinterpretation of words and information will be minimized and use of sensitive words that could
be a source of embarrassment and stigma to the community avoided.

In some African communities, myths and stigma surround most communicable diseases, yet most
of these diseases are easy to prevent and treat. The myths and stigma could have been created as a
result of lack of accurate information on the part of the community, information that could have
enabled them to explain the cause and spread of these diseases. Use of accurate and well packaged
information in the language of the community can help demystify certain issues while empowering
the community to better understand and address the issue of communicable diseases.

6. Discuss the role of language in packaging HIV/AIDS prevention messages/information.
Use of language that the community understands best is an effective way of providing accurate
information in HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support and in mitigating impact of the scourge on
those infected and affected. The local language can play an important role in creating awareness
about the disease hence minimizing stigma and promoting positive behaviour change. The
community attitudes towards the disease and to those infected and affected can easily be
addressed through use of local languages and myths confronted using the same language that
created them.

Use of local languages in designing and packaging information can allow for development of
materials that could be used across different target groups, hence reducing the cost of production
of those materials. Another advantage for using local languages in HIV/AIDS programmes is that
new terminologies and vocabulary have come with the disease; by translating these into local
languages, the vocabulary and richness of the language will be expanded, leading to increased
interest and use of those languages. By reading the HIV/AIDS information, and by listening to
information passed on to them in their language, the community’s literacy skills will be improved.
As community literacy improves and interaction and understanding of HIV/AIDS issues is enhanced, a sense of ownership and trust in the programmes will be created and clarity and practical application of ideas generated. Since the community understanding of HIV/AIDS issues will be better understood, critical thinking will also be enhanced and active participation in finding solutions to the scourge will be promoted.

Local communities possess a lot of indigenous knowledge regarding prevention, treatment, care and support of infected people; this knowledge could be tapped if a language that the community uses and understands is used. This indigenous knowledge could be built on, improved, challenged or promoted in order to provide a helpful background in packaging HIV/AIDS information and in finding sustainable solutions to the scourge.

If local language use in packaging HIV/AIDS information is to be effective, the syntax of different languages should be considered; a given word in one language could mean something different in another language. For instance, the word *keino* has different meanings in the Kalenjin and Kikuyu languages of Kenya. In the Kikuyu language, it obscene to mention the word in public; while in Kalenjin, it is a person’s name. Further, information can be effective if locally available means of communication can be used. These could include vernacular radio stations, use of songs, skits and drama and in community meetings and ceremonies. Information could also be displayed on items that the community can easily access such as T/Shirts, *Lesos/kangas* and items that are regularly used within a home.

Further, if information on HIV/AIDS is to be effective, it needs to consider the target audience. The youth, for instance, have their own preferred language which they understand better; if this language is used in packaging and delivering information, then they are likely to understand it better. In most African urban settings, street languages have developed; sometimes these are age- and area-specific, so to penetrate these areas, one will need to communicate in the language that is well understood. This communication should be informative yet persuasive, and words should be carefully selected to avoid stigma. The culture, beliefs and religions of the target population will also need to be considered while delivering information. Some words in certain communities are prohibited; the person packaging the information should be aware of them and use alternative words instead.
Also, communicating HIV/AIDS information in a local language brings out the real meaning that the community can connect with, as opposed to if another language is used. Culturally appropriate images should also be selected using illustrations of things that the community understands and uses in their daily lives.

One of the perceived limitations in use of local languages in communicating HIV/AIDS information is insufficient medical vocabulary or terminology. It is argued that the medical field has technical language that cannot be easily translated into local languages, making it challenging to explain certain health concepts, products and treatments to rural communities. This is, however, not an unsurmountable challenge since communities already have words which they use to refer to those technical concepts and these are understood and accepted by the community.

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By Grace Njeru, BTL Kenya

Bible Translation and Literacy is committed to promoting holistic development in the small language communities in Kenya. We do this through language development, scripture translation and facilitation of literacy programmes in these communities. The literacy programme is contextualized to address the felt needs of each of the communities. The HIV pandemic is one issue that remains a great concern for all the communities that BTL serves. In response to this, BTL is implementing a four faceted training programme based on the *Kande’s Story* approach to:

- Enlighten communities on their responsibility in loving and taking care of those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS
- Demystify existing myths and provide scientific facts on the pandemic
- Help people from contracting the disease
- Help the people infected living with HIV/AIDS to live quality lives.

*Kande’s Story*, which is based on real life experiences of a girl orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS and having to live in a child-headed family at the mercies of relatives, has also been contextualized to train children on HIV/AIDS related issues and is currently being used to teach life skills lessons in selected schools in 4 language communities in Kenya.

The role of language in ensuring the success and sustainability of any health programmes cannot be over-emphasized. The use of a language that majority of the target group understands ensures that people take personal responsibility over their health issues, even in the absence of health specialists. It also becomes easily to mentor community members to serve as peer educators, which ensures greater impact.

Based on the above fact, BTL translates the *Kande’s Story* book and the training manual, originally written in English, into the various languages and allows the community representatives to contextualize the terms and illustrations used in the materials to what is locally acceptable. For example, different communities use different terms in reference to the HIV/AIDS. Some words are also considered taboo in the local language and the communities have coined more acceptable terminologies.
Kande’s Story has also taken into consideration the different learning preferences of the target trainees. It is for this reason that the training manual comprises sections to allow creativity and active participation of the participants through composition of songs, poems and skits based on issues addressed in the specific lessons. BTL recognizes that a large population in the communities we serve have very low literacy levels. In view of this, Kande’s Story is also presented in a mother tongue-based audio-visual format to ensure that none of the communities miss out on this important health information.

The feedback received from the 19 communities in which this program is currently being implemented, indicates that the information on HIV/AIDS is clearer when presented in the local languages as opposed to having it presented in English or Kiswahili. For instance, at the end of a week’s training in Pokomo, one of the pastors was very excited and said “I will no longer have to play hide and seek games with my congregants who approach me with HIV/AIDS related challenges because I now know how to address these issues using words and terminologies that will not sound offensive”.
1. Introduction

This paper will examine the role of local languages in peace building and conflict resolution. Language and communication are key in the management and resolution of conflict between individuals, communities and even nations. Language is more than communication; it is the primary vehicle of communication, and it defines humanity.

Language is made up of several elements: sounds, grammar and meaning.

**Sounds:** people learn to speak a language before they learn how to write it. Most people are born with physical mechanisms that enable one to make speech sounds. However, people do not learn to produce the sounds in exactly the same way.

**Grammar** refers to the set of rules that govern how sounds may be joined into phrases and sentences e.g. the English grammar system requires that singular nouns take singular verb forms for various reasons.

**Meaning:** Language enables people to communicate their ideas, feelings and attitudes. The importance of language is essential to every aspect and interaction in our everyday lives. We use language to inform the people around us of what we feel, what we desire, and question/understand the world around us. We communicate effectively with our words, gestures, and tone of voice in a multitude of situations in our day to day interactions. It is important to note
that the words and gestures we use should be those understood by those we are communicating with or else they won’t mean anything to them i.e. the message will not be passed.

*Words* are units of meaning, symbols that stand for various objects and concepts. A word can represent an object or an abstract concept. Words have meaning because communities and cultures give them meaning. People agree that certain sounds combinations mean certain things to them.

Words can have both denotative and connotative meanings. The denotative meaning is the core meaning associated with a word, i.e. the standard dictionary definition. Denotative meanings are usually readily understood. However, when people communicate, they often use words connotatively. The connotation is the subjective meaning of a word, what a word suggests because of feelings or associations it evokes. The connotative meaning is based in the context in which the word is used, how the meaning is expressed non-verbally (tone of voice, facial expression of the speaker, etc.) and the understanding of the person who is receiving it.

Communication drives our lives and helps us to better ourselves. A study of world languages reveals many similarities. The primary differences are in alphabet, pronunciation, and grammar, but the component of meaning is always there. This similarity between all languages can mediate our understanding of the cultures and lives of other human beings. Language is the key to the heart of a culture. Language holds the power to maintain national and cultural identity and is important in ethnic and national sentiments. Language, thus, becomes a rallying point owing to its powerful and visible symbolism.

Language is not only a tool for communication and knowledge but also a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group. Respect for the languages of persons belonging to different linguistic communities, therefore, is essential to peaceful co-existence (King, 2003, p.16).

Knowledge of other people’s language as well as their culture shows that you respect the ideas that they bring to the table and you understand their needs and wants better than somebody who does
not have this background. This promotes understanding and cohesion at the individual, community
and national levels.

2. **The links between language and peace**

The interconnectedness of language and peace is evident on examination of the fields related to
peace and conflict resolution.

Peace can be defined as a state or condition of quiet, security, justice and tranquillity. The dynamic
processes involved in the resolution of conflict rely heavily on language. A renowned peace
educator has observed that conflict is a part of our lives, yet few of us have the skills to transform
conflict from being a painful destructive process to being a process of significant learning and
constructive change (Reardon, 2001, p.103).

UNESCO’s *Linguapax* programme ([http://www.linguapax.org/english](http://www.linguapax.org/english)) is an important instance of
linking language and peace. Its goal is to form a link between the teaching of foreign languages and
the promotion of international understanding and solidarity. The overall aim of the project is to
promote the capacity to work towards tolerance, peace and justice. The method adopted is a socio-
affective one i.e. learning based on empathy, prompted by real experiences organized in such a way
as to nurture socially desirable conduct.

The *Linguapax-Catalunya* project is aimed primarily at 12 to 16 year olds, i.e. those still in
compulsory secondary education, but it is open to initiatives undertaken with learners of other
ages. The Linguapax-Catalunya project comprises five teaching units based on the main challenges
facing humankind:

- Unit 1 – We live in just one world (interdependence),
- Unit 2 – We live together with others (co-operation and conflict)
- Unit 3 – Images, perceptions and stereotypes (discrimination),
- Unit 4 – The rights of the Earth (environment) and
- Unit 5 – The world restaurant (food and famine).
3. **Peace linguistics**

Another important way that the links between language and peace are being recognized is in the field of Peace linguistics. This is an emerging focus on peace-promoting, non-violent uses of languages. It places language at the centre of human organization and change; it emphasises attitudes which respect the dignity of individual language speakers. This approach uses appreciative enquiry to examine aspects of peace-building such as:

- positive change
- meaning-making
- freedom and power
- an emphasis on the positive potential of people and organizations, by focusing on the best of what has been, what is and what might be.

Proponents of peace linguistics argue that words create worlds, and that language has the power to create social change and reality.

4. **Language, peace building and conflict resolution: The Kenyan scenario**

Whenever we talk about conflict in Kenya, the 2007-2008 political violence comes to mind. Currently, the Al-Shabaab menace has redefined conflict in a manner that could not have been imagined before.

Kiraithe (2014) describes a generic conflict cycle that includes an environment of grievance, the absence of a national culture, public mobilisation around conflict, the growth of conflict and eruption of conflict. In every stage of the conflict cycle, language plays a key role.

When one thinks about an *environment* that is fertile for a conflict to occur, the typical Kenyan politician automatically comes to mind. In public speeches, the Kenyan politician will at some point switch to his or her mother tongue: but as soon as they switch to this “insider talk” the question arises: what is this politician up to? The answer may include a desire to promote a conspiracy of conflict. And so it follows that the conflicts that are shocking this country today can trace their conception to some community conspiracy, whether loud or silent, active or passive.
A direct opposite of this can be seen in Tanzania. In Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere took an approach that suppressed all the indigenous languages and lifted Kiswahili as a tool of public mobilisation, national philosophy and an integral part of a socialist governance structure. Arguably, this may not be an example that should be duplicated in Kenya in this day and age, since suppression of indigenous languages is far more likely to fuel conflict than to avoid it.

How can we use language to kill ethnic conspiracies and give our youth some national direction? I postulate that Kenya has an absence of a national philosophy or culture (generally accepted obligations of a citizen). For example, if a new preacher in town tells people to kill whoever is not worshipping as they do, is the Kenyan citizen able to immediately refute that directive? National philosophy can be embedded in song, poetry, music and dance. Those Kenyans who can remember famous Kenyan songs like *Kenya Nchi yangu, Kenya Kipenzi changu* (“Kenya my country, Kenya my beloved”) can recall the sense of patriotism such songs evoked. However, there is such a vacuum of public mobilisation that something like the criminalisation of religion (now commonly referred to as radicalisation) is filling that vacuum.

It is worth noting that language is a powerful tool for national healing and reconciliation, and for removing stereotypes that have been created about the other communities. The use of poetry, oral narratives and music to honour individual and group virtues can serve to promote peace and conflict resolution. For example, reference to “the Nyeri woman”, typically connoting a supposed dominance over one’s husband, could actually be used to identify positive traits in the Nyeri woman such as being hard working and determined.

The conflict growth stage is characterized by making the conflict a community mission as opposed to a mission to be carried out by the combatants only, recruitment and the assembling of weapons. How can the effective use and management of local languages redefine or disrupt this mobilisation so as to terminate conflict at this stage? How do we intercept at this stage?

In all traditions of war, the use of a language that the “enemy” does not understand is extremely common. Examples could include the language codes used by the military and police in various
contexts. In contrast, the intentional use of a language that is understood and acceptable to all parties involved in the conflict could play a key role in preventing or resolving a conflict.

In the *Eruption stage*, coordination of hostilities involves operational communication in coded or ethnic languages not understood by the enemy; thus language in itself becomes a lethal weapon.

Could focused management of our local languages minimise the impact of conflict and speed up its resolution?

In almost all cases where there has been conflict in Kenya, the public administrator /government representative comes to address the conflicting parties using Kiswahili. The contradiction here is that those who caused the conflict in the first place will have ensured that the “enemy” is viewed as a stranger; and now the person who comes to solve the conflict is also a stranger: “What is he/she saying?” Where ethnicity has been a factor in conflict, anyone else can also easily be declared “one of them”.

The removal of impunity is also a crucial factor in resolving conflict: identifying and punishing those who conceived and mobilised the conflict, and of course those who took part in the conflict itself. The capacity of security officers to identify these persons and assemble facts, to prove their guilt so that in the courts of law their guilt is proven beyond any reasonable doubt, depends heavily on the ability of the officers to communicate in the local language.

5. **A way forward**

   All languages are worthy to be given an equal position. This is crucial, especially in countries with a high degree of linguistic diversity. Learning and speaking other languages helps to build a new world view that liberates the learners from their respective “ghettos”. Countries that have recognized their linguistic plurality are a step ahead in promoting peace through democratic and peace-enhancing processes. It is incumbent on national leadership to promote the self-esteem of language communities and respect for their languages, and at the same time, provide access to a language of universal scope. The promotion of multilingualism without the domination of international languages will instil confidence in marginalized linguistic groups.
This is how multilingual education can be helpful for the cause of peace. In fact, learning another language enables one to empathize with another culture, with other linguistic groups, and to understand and appreciate their view of the world.

Language instructors need to be trained to encourage respect and friendship between different cultures, celebrate linguistic diversity, promote tolerance, and respect differences; the curriculum also needs to be designed to meet such an end. Language learning allows people to initiate dialogue with different groups, in their own languages. By learning another language, the learner is likely to understand people who aren't like him/her. The language-learner can be a friend of people coming from other ethnic and linguistic groups.

It is also very important that people learn the mother tongue of their ethnic community, as this is one of the most basic parts of our identity. If we lose our own languages, in my opinion, we are losing a part of ourselves.

**Break out session: Questions and feedback**

1. *“Conflict is part of our lives, yet few of us have the skills to transform conflict from a painful destructive process that it is.”* Discuss this statement in connection to the role of local language in peace building and conflict resolution.

When people use local languages they have naturally acquired skills of communication, and they can use these skills to discuss difficult issues within the society and thus enhance a peaceful and coexistent society.

When people use the local language, they can discuss the deeper problem-causing issues; this can help them to unearth the root causes of violence in short period of time.

Local languages can also be used to prevent conflict. When issues arise, all stakeholders who understand the language can be participants in the conflict resolution process.
In many local situations, arbitration and reconciliation has been key to resolving conflicts. We can continue to tap important cultural values in order to promote reconciliation, both within and outside of the community.

When people feel that their language is being respected, and when they know each other better, then local languages can be used to promote national identity.

However the group highlighted some challenges that society ought to seriously think through:

- The choice of which local language will be used at the national level to communicate and enhance a nation’s identity. This can actually be a source of conflict as people begin thinking that their language is neglected while the language of others is being promoted to the national level.
- We also have had experiences in Africa where politicians and senior government officials have used language to promote interethnic clashes and strife. The national government must check areas where language is being used wrongly, and address those issues.

2. Why is peace-building and conflict resolution important for development?
Peace-building involves all people. It can be done in a situation where there is conflict or in a situation where there is no active conflict. Conflict resolution is only used in a conflict situation. The conflict resolution cycle involves saying the truth, getting justice and ensuring that justice systems are working, promoting reconciliation to lead to sustainable peace as indicated on the cycle below.
Peace is a basic need, while development is secondary. It, therefore, follows that organizations that are involved in development must have a peaceful environment in which to operate. Peace building facilitates cohesion among members that can spur economic development as much of resources during peace periods are devoted on development and the environment is investor friendly. When conflicts are resolved, trust in leadership is promoted.

3. Describe some possible Intervention measures to enhance the use of local languages in peace-building and conflict resolution.

It was agreed by the group that when it comes to peace building, language can be viewed as a two-edged sword (as already elaborated in the key note address. Local languages can be used to promote peace but they can also be used to incite inter-ethnic hatred and animosity. It, therefore, follows that every society should ensure that in their language planning, issues of status of the language are well addressed to remove any bias or questioning as to why other languages are developed while others are ignored.

We can use local language in the implementation of good policies that will enhance growth and development, and thus, ensure that languages play a positive role in the society. Participants agreed that there have to be good partnerships between peace-building actors, to develop materials that use local languages and are based on local needs-assessment. When people read in their language, the full meaning and intention of the text becomes clear; sayings and idioms unique
to their own language attract their attention and communicate deeper meanings. That is why making materials in local languages can be a very powerful tool to communicate peace messages.

Local languages can be used when doing peace research and the development of solutions for animosity. When you do research in the local language, most probably questions are presented in a language that is non-threatening; the administrator of the questionnaire who speaks the language gains easy access to the community. As such a researcher will be able to understand the deeper meaning of those languages, and be able to communicate them so that appropriate intervention measures are put in place that will address issues that have been raised by the communities.

We can use community radio programs in local languages to communicate peace messages. This is one very powerful way of enhancing peace. In the Rwanda situation, hate messages were sent through radio stations, and this brought huge loss of life and anarchy in that country. If we were to use the same media responsibly, then we can achieve the desired results of ensuring that there is peace and intercommunity co-existence.

Every language has humour and other structures that make people like it. We can promote positive relations between communities by the use of language as we use the positive attributes of that language to be able to pass on messages of peace.
Sub-theme 4: The role of local languages in gender equality and women’s empowerment

Introductory paper

African languages and gender construction

Prof. Catherine Ndungo, Kenyatta University

1. Introduction

Many languages are genderless, while others make use of grammatical gender. Today, languages with grammatical gender are labelled as male-oriented, gender-specific, biased, or exclusive languages. It is said that this traditional use of gender marking should yield to gender-free, gender-neutral, gender-inclusive, non-sexist, bias-free, or inclusive language.

Gender scholars have argued that languages are made by men, and for men, in order to represent their worldview and perpetuate it. In this worldview, women are marked as deviant and deficient or made invisible.

2. Gender, sex, gendered and sexist language

For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on the concepts of gender, sex, sexist language and gendered language. In conceptualizing language and gender, we need to understand the terms language, sex and gender. Language is defined variously by many scholars, but for the purpose of this paper we will define it as “the process which facilitates communication between the receiver and the sender of a message”.

Sex in the context of this paper refers to the biological characteristics that categorize someone as either female or male. Sex is determined at conception. Sex is universal, biological, and physical in nature. The concepts of sex and gender are normally used interchangeably, though their meaning is actually different.
Gender is defined as the socially constructed norms and ideologies which determine the behaviour and actions of men and women based on their social cultural context. Understanding gender relations and the power dynamics behind them is a prerequisite for understanding access to and distribution of resources, the ability to make decisions and the ways in which women, men, boys and girls are affected by political processes and social development.

Gender roles constitute a set of social and behavioural norms, attitudes and tasks that are considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex in the context of a specific culture. These norms, attitudes and tasks differ widely between cultures and over time. Gender roles are affected by age, class, race, ethnicity and religion, and by the geographical, economic and political environment in which they are found. These roles are fundamental in their influence on relationships between men and women; this is clearly illustrated in the language of the given community.

Language and gender is an area of study in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. The study of language from a specific gender perspective is referred to as genderlect. Many consider that language and gender studies started with Lakoff’s (1975) Language and Woman’s Place, as well as other earlier studies by the same author.

Many studies have been carried out on how gender ideology is perpetuated through language (West and Zimmerman 1987). The dialogue on language and gender seeks to explore the extent to which language has a role in the construction, deconstruction and articulation of the gender phenomenon through linguistic forms and communication strategies. These arguments have been anchored in what is referred to as the dominance approach, which posits that gender differences in language reflect power differences.

Shitemi (2009), for example, examines the English language terms Mrs., Miss and Ms. that are used to refer to different categories of women. Ms. is a relatively new term that can refer to either an unmarried or a married woman, thus hiding her marital status as Mr. does for men. In the feminist view, the reasons for choosing one of these three terms are not only semantic but are also couched with heavy gender connotations.
Also in English, the order of referring to men and women follows the sequence *Mr. and Mrs.* rather than *Mrs. and Mr.* This not only carries semantic and gender connotations, but it is an illustration of power and dominance on one hand and subjugation and humility on the other. In Kiswahili, *Bibi na Bwana* (*Mrs. and Mr.*) is the reverse of the English order. The female referent is often ordered before the male referent, although they are mutually interchangeable depending on the context of use. Similarly, the conventional *Mke na Mume* (wife and husband) stands in opposition to *Mume na Mke* (husband and wife).

The dominance approach to gender and language views language rules as having been set by men (Spender, 1980). Thus men are viewed as the linguistic point of reference. This can be seen in the following English word pairs, where the terms associated with men have positive value while those associated with women have negative connotations.

- **Master/mistress:** *Master* refers to a man in charge, while *mistress* refers to a woman who is kept for sex purposes.
- **Governor/governess:** A *governor* is a man in charge of a province or county, as in the case of Kenya; a *governess* is equivalent to a maid or a female house help.
- **Wizard/witch:** *Wizard* is a term used to refer to a man with exceptional skills in a particular field, such as computers; while *witch* is used to refer to a female who uses witchcraft to destroy her targets. Recently in Kenya, women over 50 years of age in some parts of the Nyanza and Coast provinces have been accused of being witches, and they have been punished by being burned to death.

Apart from the demonstrating the language differences regarding men and women, and showing how they are conceived and portrayed from a cultural perspective, this analysis draws attention to gender *stereotypes*: a set of beliefs about the relative attributes of men and women. For example, a generalized view about men or women is reflected in the following notions:

- Women are bad managers; X is a woman; therefore X is a bad manager.
- Men make bad cooks; Y is a man; therefore Y is a bad cook.
- Men are strong while women are weak.
- Men are brave while women are timid.
- Men are aggressive while women are passive.
• Men are sex-driven while women are relationship-driven.
• Men are rational while women are irrational.
• Men are direct while women are indirect.
• Men are competitive while women are cooperative.
• Men are practical while women are nurturing.
• Men are rough while women are gentle.
• Men don’t cry.
• Men can keep secrets; women cannot.

These stereotypes lead to the creation and ideologisation of the concepts of man and woman in society. Such dichotomies and oppositions are both articulated in the language and played out in social relations. They hold a significant place in the construction of gender ideologies, and their representations permeate society in many ways.

The same ideology is perpetuated through the naming of men and women in many African societies. For example among the Meru, Gikuyu, Embu and Luo language communities of Kenya, men are given names of strong animals such as:

• *Njogu*: elephant (Gikuyu, Embu, Meru; Kaliech in Dholuo)
• *Muruthi*: lion
• *Ngari*: leopard
• *Ndegwa*: bull

These names are meant to depict men as strong, brave, aggressive and capable of providing security to the society.

In contrast, women are given names such as:

• *Kanini*: one who is small in size
• *Gakenia*: one who can entertain
• *Mwihaiki*: one who can beautify herself
• *Mugure/Kagure*: one for whom dowry has been paid.
Among the Kamba people of Kenya, men refer to their wives as *kiveti kyakwa* (my woman). Similarly, women refer to their husbands as *musee wakwa* (my old man/elder), *ithe witu* (our father), *ithe wasyana* (the father of the children) or *mwene musyi* (the owner of the home) (Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti, & Sunderland, 2013). Women tend to be referred to by men as objects or commodities to be owned by men, while women refer to men in terms of how they relate with them.

Further dichotomization and genderization is evident in gender-specific metaphors and figures of speech in certain Kenyan languages.

- *Kana kogi ta ithe* (Gikuyu): A child as wise as the father.
- *Kana gakigu ta nyina* (Gikuyu): A child as stupid as the mother.
- *Mume ni mume hata akiwa ni gumegume* (Kiswahili): A man is a man, despite his short comings.
- *Mke ni tabia* (Kiswahili): A woman’s virtue is in her character.

Vingerhoets et al. (1997) have found that men are believed to cry “tears of joy” while women are seen to cry “tears of sorrow”. The authors observe that this probably emanates from a cultural perspective in which crying out of sorrow is a sign of weakness. This myth is well illustrated by Achebe in his classic novel *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1958), in which he notes that in Ibo society men who had not achieved the expectations associated with their gender were referred as *efulefu* or worthless empty men, a title which was also associated with women.

The fact that women are seen as deficient is also evident in many narratives and proverbs in African languages. For example, among the Gikuyu people, the following proverb shows that women are unreliable: *Muici na kihii akenaga kiarua no muici na mundu muka akenaga akua* (If you steal in the company of a boy, you will be safe when he gets circumcised [matures to be a man]; but if you steal in the company of a woman, you will not be happy until she dies) (Ndungo, 1998).

Oral literature is an important indicator of societal perceptions regarding gender. Many traditional narratives depict the character of women and girls negatively (Choge and Oriedo 2005; Kabira 1993). In the Luhya, Gikuyu and Kalenjin communities of Kenya, women are portrayed as being gullible and easily deceived. Mbughuni (1982), Balisidya Matteru (1982) and Ndungo (1998) argue
that the images of men and women in Kiswahili songs, narratives and proverbs portray women as being largely to blame for the challenges that men face in life (Schipper, 1992). Such negative images can be deconstructed using the same languages that were used to create them.

In some African languages, women are equated to animals such as goats, cows and camels, especially in marriage negotiations. Among the Somali, if a man is killed his clan is compensated with 100 camels, while a woman’s death is compensated with 50; this is an indication that their lives are not considered to be equal in that society (Schlee and Sahado 2002). There is even a Somali proverb which justifies a man’s dominant position: *Deyyo warhantti ichi iskagoorrahto urahe kakhabta* (Women carry the knife with which they cut their throats, at the hip). The interpretation of this proverb is that only male dominance prevents women from doing harm to themselves. Stereotypes are not based on research and evidence; but they support and reinforce the traditional gender division.

### 3. Conclusion

African languages and literatures can be used to defuse patriarchal landmines in the spirit of shared values and cultures, by embracing the practice of nego-feminism and mediation (Nnaemeka 2004). This can be done through negotiation, accommodation and compromise with regard to language that refers to women and men. Language is dynamic, and it changes in accordance with people’s values and philosophy. For example, the Kiswahili language has acquired new ways to refer to people with various types of disability, such as:

- **asiyeona**: one who does not see; instead of *kipofu*, which refers to a blind thing.
- **asiyesikia**: one who does not hear, instead of a deaf thing.

The gender discourse can adopt this approach, so as to develop language which is more inclusive and respectful to both genders.

**Break out session: Questions and feedback**

Language is an important medium of communication, but it has also played a role in furthering gender inequalities. Language plays an important role in the construction and perpetuation of beliefs about gender. It has both pros and cons in examining and expressing gender ideologies. If
language use patterns in a community are scrutinized, gender inequalities can be seen which unfortunately affect women more than men. These inequalities arise due to the unequal treatment of men and women. If societies are to minimize or eradicate gender inequality, dialogue needs to take place in the languages that are best understood by those involved, and in a way that does not worsen existing inequalities. African languages, therefore, have an important role in minimizing or eliminating these inequalities, and in promoting a more balanced and positive narrative on gender.

In some African communities, women themselves play a role in reinforcing some of the existing gender inequalities. For instance, in these communities, mothers and aunties hold an important place in moulding a girl’s character and behaviour. They teach a girl how they are supposed to, or not supposed to, behave. It is not difficult to come across statements such as “Behave like a girl” or “Girls should not do that”. Girls are taught from early ages to respect and serve their husbands, and their roles defined early in life. The girls’ behaviour is expected to conform to certain societal expectations, which are not necessarily helpful but are sometimes rigorously enforced by women themselves. Knowingly or unknowingly by so doing, the same gender biases are passed on over generations by people who are themselves victims of this inequality. Hence, an effective strategy in addressing these inequalities should target both genders and not just men, who are perceived as those responsible for the inequalities.

Some examples of words in African languages mentioned during the conference that show gender bias include the following: In the Kikuyu language of Kenya, the word *mwiritu* is used for an unmarried woman. The deeper meaning implied in this word is the “one who receives”. For the male gender, the word for boy is *mwanake* which literary means “the one to whom the baton will be passed”. This implies that inheritance will be passed on to the boy. A woman is called *mutumia* which literally means “the one who shuts up”. The implied meaning here is that she needs to obey and submit to the man’s authority and leadership. Compare this to the word for a man, which is *muthuri* which means “honourable”. Implied in this meaning is that the man is to be respected.

Another example given is from the Luhyia community of Kenya. A woman in this community who is married is described by the things she is going to do in marriage, words such as *omubwani* (“one who lights fire”), *omuteshi* (“one who cooks”). etc. From these examples, it can be seen that a
woman enters into marriage knowing that her place has already been marked out by the names they call her. She is expected to serve the man and submit to his authority. Some of the gender biases arise from the time a child is born. In some African communities, fathers have the prerogative of naming newborns. When the newborn child is male, they will choose names that represent strength or dominance. These could be, for instance, names of strong male animals or anything in nature that is hard, strong, dominant etc. If the child is female, however, names representing beauty or sweet-but-fragile things are given to them. It is not uncommon even in western societies to hear girls being referred to as pretty, flower, baby, honey or sugar. These names given to children could to, a certain extent, reinforce the already existing gender imbalances and biases.

Another example from the Kikuyu culture of Kenya is that when a boy child is born, five ululations will be sounded; but if it is a girl, only three ululations. A girl in this environment grows up knowing that they are the weaker and less favoured gender, and their ability to excel might be limited by such cultural attitudes.

The other area in which African languages may contribute to gender inequality is through words spoken especially to encourage the boy child. Statements such as “Do not allow a girl to beat you”, or “You are as weak as a girl”, though meant to encourage the boy child, end up instilling a feeling of inferiority in girls. In the event that a boy is beaten by a girl, whether in class, games or in carrying out certain responsibilities, then the boy is ridiculed by his age mates. When given common chores, a boy may be expected to take on more than what the female counterparts take on, just to show that he is better and/or stronger. A participant from Ethiopia gave an interesting example of a saying from his community which says: “One man can do what 99 women can do.” This depicts a man as very strong and more intelligent, and rates his ability as equal to that of 99 women. This is certainly erroneous and needs to be corrected.

Another area where gender discrimination has been displayed is through African stories and literature. Much of this literature depicts men as strong and domineering characters who do such work as hunting, while women are depicted as gatherers and housewives. Sometimes the gender bias is not so overt but subtle. In children’s readers, the language used emphasizes masculinity, competency, achievement oriented and rationality for men, while women are usually depicted as
emotional. Men characters seem to be favoured in children’s readers and the depiction of strong masculinity feeds into the traditional male stereotypes.

Some of the things that could be done to end gender bias are as follows:

- Writers and educators should make efforts to write and use books which are fair and unbiased towards both sexes. Fairness should be seen in text, illustrations and in instruction and delivery of content. Learners too could be encouraged to be gender sensitive as they participate in the learning process and as they interact with other learners.

- Societal attitudes, perceptions, ideologies and constructs that promote gender bias should be confronted. Language is just a means through which these biases are expressed and as such, the real causes of these biases should be identified, examined and challenged. If the real issues are addressed, then language will also change to reflect this change.

- There is need to provide adequate knowledge and information so that people are convinced and motivated to participate actively in changing cultural practices that undermine gender equality.

- An environment should be created in which the status of women can be improved. This could be through reforms or affirmative actions both on the social, legal and political fronts aimed at correcting existing inequalities. Language change should accompany these changes.

- Words, either spoken or written, that have gender connotations should be replaced with gender neutral terms.
Concluding remarks and a way forward

The two and half days’ conference ended on a high note. As the breakout sessions demonstrated, there was broad consensus on the issues discussed, as well as a great deal of learning between organizations and the different countries that were represented at the conference. The animated discussion throughout was an indication that participants engaged with the issues, right to the very end of this conference.

The big question that remained to be answered was: How to work through the mass of accumulated knowledge to make an impact in the countries and institutions represented, as well as the communities served by these participating organizations? It is one thing to gain new knowledge, accept it and be excited about the prospects of the possible transformation that this knowledge has for our communities in Africa; it is quite another thing to actually plan for using this knowledge to activate the power it holds.

As a way forward, therefore, the organizers of the conference challenged the participants at the end of the conference to think through the learnings of the week, and to make a plan of how they will use such learning in their respective organisations for the benefit of the communities they serve. To help participants come up with such a plan, they were asked to think through a set of questions that included what they were going to do differently as a result of attending the conference. Participants were guided to explore what must change within their organizations, who they would engage with about the needed changes, what the beginning point would be, the possible challenges of implementing such change, how to address those challenges, and where to begin such a process.

It was while representatives from various organisations read the plans they had come up with that we grasped the shifts in attitudes that had taken place and the desire to see some change. The reported changes included, but were not limited to, the following: developing mother tongue-friendly language policies for working, writing more materials in community languages, engaging with communities for advocacy on the importance of mother tongue, and modifying sessions that had originally been planned for in other languages, so as to begin working in mother languages.

It became clear to many at the conference that there is a place for local languages as we engage communities in matters of education, health, peace-building and conflict resolution, gender inclusivity and the general development of societies. The wealth of knowledge and experience from plenary speakers, group discussions and shared examples pulled all of us to a common realization. Having said that, we were not naïve to other perspectives that have permeated society, where languages have been used inappropriately resulting in divisions and animosities between different people groups. The conference participants were of the view that those of us who use language positively must work with relevant authorities to debunk the myths that do not support the positive aspects of languages, while pointing out when languages are used negatively.
As we walked out of the meeting room for the final group photograph, it was clear that positive professional relationships had been established among the participants. They had an opportunity to interact and think together on the issue of local language use for development; now the big job of implementation awaits them!
Participating Organisations

ANTBA
*Association Nationale de Traduction de la Bible et l’Alphabétisation* (ANTBA) aims to translate the Bible into the languages of Burkina Faso, and to offer literacy training in local languages. ANTBA is strong in implementation of mother tongue-first formal education and adult literacy programs, and has been active in producing materials in local languages for both children and adult learners.

Bible Society of Kenya (BSK)
BSK is a non-sectarian, non-denominational organization that serves all Christian churches, church organizations and individuals. BSK activities include the following: Bible translation and distribution, oral Bible-storying, HIV/AIDS awareness training, outreach to youth and children, Braille Scriptures, scholarly Scriptures, church relations and outreach to marginalized communities.

Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL)
BTL is a Christian organization that was established in 1981 to facilitate Bible translation and sustainable Literacy and language development programmes among small language groups in Kenya and beyond. These language groups are isolated by harsh climate and rough terrain; many of them are limited in the areas of education and development. BTL’s literacy mission is to facilitate social and economic development through the provision of literacy skills. BTL believes that learning to read boosts practical, social and spiritual values of the development process for marginalized people groups.

Chemchemi Ya Ukweli
Chemchemi Ya Ukweli (CYU) – Kiswahili for *Wellspring of Truth*—Trust is an interfaith movement that was founded in 1997 by a group of religious leaders concerned about the growing culture of violence in Kenya. Its founders, who were rooted in the ideas of Catholic social teaching, introduced the concept of “active non-violence” as an alternative means in the struggle for peace and justice in that country.

Development Expertise Center Ethiopia (DEC)
This organisation facilitates child–centred comprehensive development interventions to create a safe and conducive environment for children. DEC organizations that sent participants for the language advocacy workshop were: Jimma College of Teacher Education, Nekemte College of Teacher Education, Mettu University, the Afar Regional State, the Amhara Regional State, the Oromia Regional State, Nekeme, Baherdar, Board, Maedot, NVEA, NED and KETA.

Dupoto-e-Maa
Dupoto-e-Maa (Olkejuado Pastoralists Development Organization) is a local indigenous membership organization formed in 1993 by local Maasai professionals. Its main objective is to promote education and economic development among the marginalized pastoralists. This
organization was one of the implementing partners of the Local Expertise Centre in an Edukans Foundation-funded education project in Kenya that ended in 2015.

**Faith to Action network**
This network serves as a multi-faith platform to advocate for family health and wellbeing in collaboration with key stakeholders at global, regional, national and local levels. It seeks to increase the awareness of internal and external stakeholders regarding the role of faith organizations, interfaith commitment and collaboration in support of family health and wellbeing, and to improve understanding of scientific and/or faith-based evidence for family health and wellbeing to internal and external stakeholders.

**Help Self Help Centre**
This NGO focuses on promoting agri-business. Its geographical focus is the Mt. Kenya region, but staff are also available to work in other areas where their expertise is needed. The organization trains farmers in entrepreneurship, and promotes local processing of raw materials so that value is added and farmers receive a better price for their products. HSHC was a partner of the Local Expertise Centre for Research and Development in the implementation of a project funded by the Edukans Foundation.

**Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)**
Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development is a state corporation mandated to develop curricular and curriculum support materials for all levels of education below the university level.

**Kenya Methodist University**
The Kenya Methodist University (KeMU) is a chartered private university founded by the Methodist Church in Kenya. The university seeks to provide quality training through scholarship and the advancement of knowledge through research and development. KeMU’s aim is to produce effective graduates with appropriate practical and specialised skills, attitudes and values required for personal growth and advancement of responsible citizens in the global environment. KeMU participates in community service through the provision of continuing education, research, and the provision of specialist consultative or referral services. KeMU further undertakes facilitation of community empowerment, promotion of fairness and natural justice, and maintenance of good neighborliness with the community.

**Local Expertise Centre for Research and Development (LEC RD)**
LEC Kenya began in April 2008, and transformed to its present NGO status in 2010. It was initiated by the Edukans Foundation of the Netherlands as a network secretariat for the foundation’s partner organizations in Kenya. LEC RD closely works and cooperates with its partners, to mobilize intellectual support and provide technical backstopping, and to establish linkages and networks with appropriate partners/governments. LEC focuses on the following themes: basic education, vocational training and market linkages, ICT, climate change and international exchange programs. LEC RD was instrumental in mobilizing its network organizations to participate in the conference.
National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK)
NCCK is a family of Christian communions and organisations in Kenya. Its mission is to transform lives through ecumenism, capacity building, advocacy and service delivery. NCCK has been part of a Kenyan network created by the Edukans Foundation, and was part of an Edukans-funded education project in Kenya which ended in 2015.

SIL International
SIL International is a faith-based nonprofit organization committed to serving language communities worldwide as they build capacity for sustainable language development. SIL does this primarily through research, translation, training and materials development. SIL works alongside ethnolinguistic communities and their partners as they discover how language development addresses the challenging areas of their daily lives—social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual.

Transworld Radio (TWR-Kenya)
TWR is a Christian media organisation, part of a global network of partners proclaiming God's Word through radio. Its programs include both devotional and development themes. Through its development programs, TWR envisions an informed and empowered society living a holistic life; to this end, TWR and aims to transform attitudes, beliefs and behaviour, bringing about lasting change. Its development programs cover health, agriculture, environment, family, youth and gender issues.

Women Education Researchers of Kenya (WERK)
WERK is a professional association of researchers (both women and men) in social science, particularly education. The researchers are united in their pursuit of gender equality and promotion of female professionals. The organization’s vision is to see a society that values the centrality of knowledge for the creation of a humane, equitable and prosperous society. Its mission is to contribute to the entrenchment of the principles of equity, justice and peace in Kenya for all Kenyans by linking research to advocacy.

Woord en Daad
This Dutch organization aims to establish visible signs of God’s coming Kingdom, through overcoming poverty and suffering. The organization’s goal is to connect people worldwide in their fight against poverty. Together with partner organizations in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, as well as relevant actors and sectors, it seeks to contribute towards a sustainable transformation both in the North and the South. Woord ed Daad’s main sectors of operation include provision of basic needs and emergency aid, education, enterprise development, jobs and income. The organization was represented in the language conference by a staff member from the Woord en Daad office in Ethiopia.

World Concern
World Concern is a Christian global relief and development agency extending opportunity and hope
to people facing extreme poverty. The organization has an office in Nairobi and is implementing
development projects especially targeting marginalized communities.

**World Vision Kenya**
World Vision Kenya is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to
working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision
began its operations in Kenya in 1974, and currently provides assistance to children and
communities in 35 of the 47 counties in Kenya. Motivated by God’s love, the organization serves
alongside the poor and oppressed focusing on those who are most vulnerable, regardless of a
person’s religion, race, ethnicity or gender. The organization partners with the government,
communities, donors and corporate partners to increase protection, participation and wellbeing of
the most vulnerable children.

**Guest organization: LEAD Asia**
LEAD Asia serves minority language communities in Asia by helping them find their voice, through
designing writing systems, developing materials such as dictionaries and traditional stories and
practical manuals to better their lives, advocating for mother tongue based multilingual education,
and finding appropriate local solutions to immediate livelihood issues.
References


