

Turning to Indigenous Languages for Increased Citizen Participation in the African Development Process

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Introduction

Development, seen as a general improvement of human life, though very desirable, has eluded most nations in the world. As a result of differences in the level of development attained, the world's countries are divided into the developed and developing nations. Save probably for South Africa, the rest of Africa fits into the latter category. Whereas many attempts have been made to explain the circumstances under which African and other third world countries are striving to develop, the role of language in the entire process has not been exhaustively explored. This paper, therefore, endeavours a discussion on what ought to be the central role of language in the African development process. The first part, attempts to make a brief elaboration of the theoretical framework that has guided the understanding of development. The second section looks at development in Africa and the role of language in the process. It concludes by offering recommendations on the way forward and indicating particular areas that need appropriate language policy steps to ensure that African languages get their rightful role in involving the citizens in development endeavours. For Africa to maintain its identity and attain meaningful development, African nations must use their languages to empower their people who will then be able to contribute to their full potential.

Development: Theoretical Perspectives

Development is a concept that has attracted the attention of economic theorists, political leaders and other policy-makers, as well as scholars from other fields. Consequently, many theories and models have been advanced at different times to explain the phenomenon. Given the different viewpoints, both within and between fields, development continues to be of central concern to many. By far, most commentators on development have done so from an economic standpoint. Because of that many of the models advanced to explain the process of development are economic. These include: Rostow's Stages of Economic Development; the neoclassical economic theory of resource allocation; the theory of international trade; comparative advantage theory, and the Keynesian economics among many others. However, most of these have not adequately explained the development process, especially with regard to inequalities in development between countries. More importantly, various policies fronted by their proponents have not led to expected improvements in the developing countries. The main question, though, with regard to these theories is the extent to which they are equally applicable to the developed industrialized economies and the developing ones. Indeed, do they work equally well in all developing countries? In our case, are they at all appropriate for African economies?

Another line of criticism is centered on their emphasis on economic growth and development. In general, development looked at from a purely economic growth perspective, faces considerable amounts of criticism. For instance, economic growth models are linked to increased GNP rather than to improved living conditions. Different development strategies applied to Africa and the rest of the developing world, initially import substitution and self-reliance, and later the IMF sponsored structural adjustment facility and the World Bank's structural adjustment loans, cannot be said to have changed the face of the African development process. While structural adjustment is credited with a rehabilitation of Latin American economies in terms of monetary and financial criteria, they have been criticized for increasing the levels of poverty in society (Bartoli, 2000). The same is evident in Africa. Rather than lead to improved living conditions, structural adjustment has increased the number of the impoverished. Reduction in the resources that governments spend in education, health and other services has meant more people being denied access to these services. There is very little evidence to suggest that the shift to liberalization and privatization will lead to a reversal of the trend. On the contrary, an already bad situation is evidently being made worse.

Consequently, there are those who argue for a more expanded view of development (Abdalla 1984, Bartoli 2000). Bartoli (2000), for instance, says that development is not merely growth. Viewed more widely, it encompasses the general improvement of a people's material well-being, with areas of concern including: food, health, education, life expectancy, to mention a few. Therefore, limiting development to economic growth, measured by traditional indicators like growth in a country's GDP or GNP would seem to simplify the issue at hand. In "The Meaning of Development", a widely quoted article, Seers (1969) laments the fact that, despite knowing very well that development consists of much more than economic growth, most talk appears to target national income. He further contends that, often, development is confused with economic development and economic development with economic growth. He sees poverty, unemployment, and inequality as the three most important factors in attaining development, with reduction in the three being an indicator of development.

In looking at development, the UNDP concerns itself more with human development, which it views as the development of people, by the people and for the people. In its 1993 Report (quoted in Bartoli, 2000) development is dealt with by placing people at the centre of economic and political change. This is in the understanding that people need to guide the state and markets, which should be serving them and not vice versa.

...which raises the question of popular participation in all its forms (familial, social, cultural and political), of reflection on discrimination, violence and exclusion, and of looking at the participation of civil society and, more particularly, at the role of the non-governmental organizations (Bartoli 2000:13).

The concern expressed above, which fits this paper's focus on language in development, is one that cries for attention as it has not been adequately addressed.

It is probably in the realization of the need for a broader conceptualization of development that the United Nations has come to adopt the view that "development is simultaneously economic, social, ecological and cultural" (Bartoli, 2000). In its wider sense, therefore, development should be taken to involve all issues in society. These include, but are not limited to: environmental issues, water resources, health services, education, infrastructure, political freedom, and cultural values. Besides, poverty eradication ought to be one of the most important driving forces in all development endeavors. All these contribute to improvements in the general well-being of humankind. Essentially, development ought to be multi-dimensional, with social considerations being given primacy and the economic considerations, though very important, viewed as an instrument (Bartoli (2000). In this light, Abdalla (1984) states that "third world countries must see development as being first of all based on the assertion of their cultural identity". What he advocates is significant because of the need for such countries to maintain their cultural heritages by striving to develop without complete westernization. In any case, the two are not synonymous.

Development in Africa

In both the narrow economic and broader sense, Africa is glaringly underdeveloped. In view of the myriad problems bedeviling the African continent, one does not need to be a Harvard or London School of Economics trained development economist to appreciate the extent of the problems faced by people in their everyday struggles in life. A walk down the roads (they hardly fit the definition of the term) in almost all the cities, or a visit to health facilities, where any are available, are just among the many daily reminders of the urgent need for immediate action. Indeed, indicators of Africa's underdevelopment state are open for anyone who cares to look: it has the majority of the world's poorest nations, the highest illiteracy rate, and the highest foreign debt burden. The list could be much longer. That need not be the case though for Africa is not inherently poor. With all its resources, African people deserve much better.

No change can be expected anytime soon without addressing the existing imbalances in international trade relations. How do we hope to see African nations emerge from their current states if they are used as testing grounds for new economic growth and development models? If it is not Structural Adjustment Programmes, it is market liberalization and privatization. Perhaps deserving more scrutiny is the role of our African economists and political leaders. They accept measures touted as avenues of getting Africa out of her current situation, only to turn around and condemn them loudly when their negative effects become obvious. They suddenly rediscover their expertise and tell us that such models were doomed from the beginning because they failed to take into account Africa's unique conditions. This seems to be the scenario being described by Prebisch (1988) who talks about unconditional submission to theories formulated in the center. The question we should be asking therefore is: how much commitment has Africa shown in spending time and resources to develop locally based models?

Perhaps a theory that best captures the situation in Africa with regard to development is the Dependency Theory. According to this theory, the world is divided into two: the centre (industrialized capitalist countries) and the periphery (all developing countries). The relationship between the two, in which periphery countries are subjected to decisions taken in the centre, is dependence. Prebisch (quoted in Mbaabu, 1996) contends that the consequence of such external pressures is inability of a country to decide what it should and should not do. The following words serve to clarify the relationship even more:

It is true that centers, in particular the main dynamic center of capitalism, have concerned themselves with the development of the periphery only in so far as it served their own interests, and generally with little breadth of outlook. They have been indifferent to look for ways in which interests could converge. An enormous and enlightened effort, a tenacious and long-drawn-out effort of its own, will be necessary before a peripheral country can cease to be peripheral (Prebisch, 1988: 33).

It could not be stated any better. To begin to disentangle themselves from this dependence, African states need to work together in search for models that take local conditions into account to drive their development process. A statement made way back in 1974 by the United Nations should have prodded us towards that direction with more vigor. It said:

...since no development model can claim to be the only one possible, the task now is to start with the real societal contexts and ensure the right of every country to adopt the economic and social system it deems the most appropriate to its own development and not to be subjected to discrimination of any kind as a result (Bartoli, 2000:36).

Although there have been attempts at achieving the above, very little success has been attained so far. Efforts that readily come to mind include the Lagos Plan of Action of the seventies. According to Chileshe (1984) the Lagos Plan of Action was intended to restructure African economies “on the basis of twin principles: (a) national and collective self-reliance and (b) self-reliant and self-sustaining development...” Whereas Africa was not more self-reliant and integrated by the year 2000 as envisaged by the LPA, its spirit and that of similar endeavours needs to be upheld. A possible route towards that goal is support for regional bodies as they are a step in the establishment of wider integration and intra-African trade, leading to African development. Similarly, one is reminded of the observation made by Adebayo Adedeji in an address to the 14th session of the Economic Commission for Africa in 1979, that a true test of any development strategy is its ability to enable all of us “to pursue relentlessly and with single-minded determination the objectives of establishing a new national and regional economic order in Africa based on an increasing measure of national and collective self-reliance and dedicated to the task of achieving an equitable distribution of the products of development among the African peoples” (quoted in Chelische, 1984). That observation is true now as it was then but, unfortunately, there are many questions still in need of answers. For instance, is Africa pushing for the same goals as a united entity? Are there enough attempts made to

distribute the few products of development that accrue among the people in African nations?

With appropriate policies in individual African countries, as well as under international umbrella bodies, Africa can begin to cease to be peripheral. In this regard, NEPAD and the African Union have a big challenge to rise to the occasion and steer Africa out of its current state of continued dependency. Furthermore, in disregard of the United Nations' position referred to earlier, that countries determine their own policies, and in the true character of dependency, the center still determines what happens in the periphery. The pressure manifests itself in different forms, the most common being stringent aid conditionalities. And this is despite evidence that the impacts of such strategies have proven to be negative. For instance, the European Union recently withdrew some 12 billion shillings that it had promised the Kenyan Government two years ago as budgetary support, and the IMF and World Bank have instructed the same Government not to accept any external loan without a 35 per cent grant component at the minimum. A recent study done by EcoNews and Britain's Traidcraft Exchange (Wahome, 2005) on Kenya, details how many industries have collapsed under the weight of liberalization being adopted in Kenya and other developing countries. It urges the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries not to accept the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that are being discussed with the European Union due to the fear that such a pact will have similar consequences.

Since the continued lagging behind of African development has been aptly handled by many studies from different viewpoints, this paper will now turn to its goal, the linguistic perspective.

The Place of language in the Development Process

The Dependency theory, briefly outlined above, is very relevant to the thesis of this paper because Africa's dependence to the North is not limited to economics. In fact, culture and language constitute a significant part of that dependence. Mazrui (quoted in Mbaabu, 1996) divides dependence into two categories: structural dependence dealing with economic, military and political dependence, and cultural dependence. The latter, which affects peoples' values, tastes, skills and ideas, is perhaps more dangerous. It is in the second category that language plays an important part.

Current language attitudes and perceptions in Africa are, to a large extent, attributable to colonial language policies which independent African states have been unable to change considerably. With the benefit of hindsight, one can only conclude that the colonial administration machine, knowing the important role of language in shaping ones identity, initiated language policies that were meant to subdue their subjects, making them more susceptible to western languages and cultures. Many began to disdain their languages and other cultural practices, trying instead very hard to learn the western ways. This view is exemplified by the following position held by Ramund, a French Minister of Education in 1897. He said that after defeating Algeria militarily, and making it follow the French administration system, the third victory would use education to make them accept French

as more important language and regard their dialects with contempt (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995).

In general, their policies were aimed at making Africans view their languages as inferior and less competent while holding the colonial languages with high esteem. Indeed, knowledge of these languages became an important weapon in the search for employment. It has since been seen as a mark of education and a major contributor to one's socio-economic advancement. According to Mbaabu (1996: 7), "opportunities for good jobs and higher education depended on one's knowledge of the foreign language". To date, many are those who still feel that knowledge of English, French and other colonial languages opens doors for the future. Bamgbose (2003) says that within the education system most students see very little value in learning African languages. Similar views were expressed by high school students learning Kiswahili in Kenya in a research by Mohochi (2005). Most held the position that they see very little to be gained in future, especially in the job market, by studying Kiswahili.

One of the colonial legacies of African countries is, therefore, the inheritance of their colonizers' languages as official or national languages. Consequently, Africa is divided linguistically as English, French, and Portuguese speaking; classifications that make very little sense especially when you consider the percentages of people who can actually function in those languages. The percentages may be different, but usually those who know the ex-colonial languages well constitute less than 15% of the population in African countries. Mohochi (2003) makes reference to an assertion by Kembo-Sure that approximately 50% of Kenyans speak Kiswahili with varying degrees of intelligibility while less than 5% understand English. Mberia (2000) talks about a 1980 report which indicated that Kenya had 65.3% and 16.1% second language speakers of Kiswahili and English respectively. The situation may well be worse in neighbouring Uganda and Tanzania. Given those conditions, it is foolhardy to continue with policies that give English precedence, unless of course the purpose is to exclude the masses.

It was widely expected that after gaining independence, the new leadership in African nations would aggressively pursue language policies that were in tandem with the general quest for establishing a separate identity, with respect for things African. With Africanisation of the civil service and other sectors, it was expected that African languages too would be given more prominent roles. That was not to be as colonial languages remained at the centre stage. Pursuance of such policies has polarized our populations into those with a command of the ex-colonial languages and those without, a categorization that greatly affects one's ability to contribute to national debates and development endeavours.

These language policies need to be looked at afresh precisely because they are largely responsible for the exclusion of many from the development process. People cannot be expected to actively participate in any efforts if they do not understand them in the first place. Grant (1984) rightly points out that recent achievements in human history, including the end of colonialism, the rise of civil rights, and the fight for women's equality, were not made possible only through government proclamations. People

organized and demanded change, hence making it politically right for governments to act. Likewise, the role of people's participation in developing Africa cannot be overemphasized, especially taking into consideration the type of leaders at the helm in African states. There is need for creating awareness among the people so that they actively play their role by, among others, exerting pressure on governments to respond appropriately to their demands. But this cannot be attained without effective communication which is undoubtedly, an inevitable and very significant ingredient in the African development process, as noted earlier by Fardon and Furniss (1994) and Benjamin (1994) among others. Whereas horizontal communication is smooth (among the elite in former colonial languages and the masses in local languages), it is the missing vertical communication (between the leaders and the rest of the population) that needs to be improved in order to attain increased participation of the masses in Africa's development strives. Africa can simply not afford to continue ignoring its indigenous languages.

I would like to elaborate this with a common practice in Kenyan politics, which I believe is not unique to Kenya. Language is one of the general requirements for entry into elective politics in Kenya with Kiswahili and English being the required languages. The two are permissible in debates in the national assembly although a big percentage of members of parliament use English. However, in communicating with the wider population, Kiswahili is preferred. During campaign periods and whenever there are important debates, politicians take it even a step further and resort to their various indigenous languages, usually to appeal to narrow ethnic and regional interests for their survival. There are two main lessons to be drawn from this practice. Firstly, they recognize the importance of language in mobilizing the masses. Secondly, they realize that they can only reach the majority by turning to African languages. They are, however, dishonest and largely selfish in their use of local languages. Evidence of that stems from the fact that they conveniently forget the importance of those languages once they attain their goals. On ensuring their political survival, they turn to the use of foreign languages in discussing issues that affect their people, who ironically are better mobilized through the local languages. They do this in total exclusion of the very people that they always claim to be serving. In such a scenario, the people are hardly involved. Most simply board the development bus unaware of its destination.

This can clearly be illustrated by the current constitutional debate in Kenya. For more than a decade, Kenyans have been fighting for the enactment of a new constitutional dispensation. The last few years witnessed an elaborate constitutional review process whose main focus was an attempt to involve the people as much as possible. The process culminated in the publishing of the New Kenya Constitution Draft in August this year. The Draft is currently being debated in the entire country in readiness for a national referendum that will be held on November 21st and the President has used every available opportunity to remind Kenyans to read and understand the Draft before casting their votes. Significant to our argument here, though, is the fact that the Draft is in English. How many Kenyans are expected to understand what they will be voting for or against come November? Isn't that the very opposite of trying to make the process all inclusive? As if to try and remedy the situation, there are plans to release a Swahili version

sometime in October. Welcome as it may be, it will be coming too late. Besides, it is important to keep in mind the fact that there are many who do not understand Kiswahili either. Unfortunately, this sort of omission is not limited to the constitutional debate as it has become characteristic of all national debates in the country.

The following anecdote, reported in the *East African Standard*, a daily in Kenya helps to explain the point further. A citizen in North Eastern province was asked to give his views on the constitution review debate, and he said “we would like to vote for Moi’s party but will the present president (Mwai Kibaki) hand over power?” Kenyan elections are not due until December 2007 and the issue at hand is a constitutional referendum but obviously this person is least aware of the facts. This is an illustration of a situation in which a very important national debate is going on among a few with the majority oblivious of the happenings. That is a typical scenario in most of rural Kenya, and indeed in many other African countries. Its continuation does a great injustice to our citizens.

The way Forward for Africa

Having been subjected to such language use practices since the colonial period, with their resultant brainwashing effects over time, what are required are very well thought out language policies that can help to counter the skewed arguments peddled earlier. Consciousness levels among our people must be raised in order for them to begin to appreciate the significance of their languages in their lives, especially how they shape their worldview. There is need for campaigns that can help raise our people’s sense of pride and respect for, not only their languages, but also other aspects of the culture that helps to define them. More importantly, people must be assisted to appreciate the role that indigenous languages can, and ought, to play in their lives. This can be achieved by giving indigenous languages more space especially in official domains. The more the number of important official domains that our languages play a big role in, the more appreciated they will become.

While there have been numerous efforts to address the language question in individual states and to some extent regionally and continentally, such efforts have not yielded expected results. One is immediately reminded of the African Languages Bureau which did not last long enough to achieve its objectives. The Intergovernmental Conference on Language Policies in Africa, hosted by UNESCO in Harare Zimbabwe in 1997 led to the Harare Declaration in which each country represented, declared its commitment to several important positions on language policies in Africa. The spirit of the declaration, well captured by Thondhlana (2000) was the development of a democratic Africa, in which ethno linguistic pluralism is celebrated; where the African identity is preserved; and where peaceful coexistence of people, speaking different languages is promoted. A few statements from the declaration, on the type of Africa desired, deserve a mention here:

A democratic Africa that seeks to enhance the active participation of all citizens in all institutions-social, economic, political, et cetera;

A democratic Africa where development is not construed in narrow economic goals but instead in terms of a culturally valued way of living together, and within

a broader context of justice, fairness and equity for all; respect for linguistic rights and human rights, including those of minorities;

Africa where scientific and technological discourse is conducted in the national languages as part of our cognitive preparation for facing the challenges of the next millennium (Thondhlana, 2000:31).

What we need to ask ourselves though is: have the governments represented in the conference, as well as those not present, taken steps to fulfill these noble goals? It can hardly be said that linguistic rights are being adhered to in any meaningful way in Africa. Certainly, very little has been done thus far to ensure active participation of our citizens in any of the important institutions in society, and the majority is unaware of the wonderful technological advances that the world now enjoys.

Commenting on earlier views on Underdevelopment Theory, Harrison (1988) argues that industrialization and development does not occur only when a country is closely linked to the West. As a matter of fact, the links, be they through colonization or economic, do reinforce dependence. "...countries which once had the strongest links with the metropolitan powers are now the most underdeveloped of all". He further states that countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico recorded much more growth when their links to the metropolises were weakest, for example, during the World Wars. These links include the cultural and linguistic as well. In this regard, Africa needs to consider the Asian example. Countries in Asia have restricted their links, guarded their languages and cultures and are more developed than African nations that seem to be only too willing to cling to earlier relationships with the West.

We must face the fact that, despite being here for many years, the colonial languages have remained the preserve of the educated minority. This, unfortunately, will not change anytime soon. Our best choice is to turn to our indigenous languages. They should be developed and assigned more roles in society. That way, we shall be involving many of our people and together we shall chart our destiny. By failing to do that, we continue to divide our masses into two categories which do not necessarily work towards a common ultimate goal. The following are obvious areas to begin with.

Of critical concern is education, not only because of its invaluable contribution in the African development process, but also the significant role it plays in language development. Colonial language policies in education in East Africa were not constant during the whole colonization period. Initially, indigenous languages had a role to play within the education system. They were taught as subjects and used as languages of instruction in the lower levels of the education system. Because of the multiplicity of languages in most African nations, it was very difficult to use many indigenous languages in education, mainly due to lack of adequate reading materials. Fortunately, in East Africa, Swahili had spread widely and was spoken by people from different tribes in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. It had established itself as a language of inter-ethnic communication. It also had by far, the largest number of publications among all local languages. Consequently, it was favoured in education. However, towards the end of the

colonial rule in the 1950s there was a shift in the language policy. Kiswahili was no longer favoured and instead English occupied a more central role in education (Gorman 1974, Mbaabu 1996). Ironically, this was the time the position held by UNESCO, that using a child's language or one that is closer to it, is good for educational achievement, was gaining in popularity. Despite those views (expressed in UNESCO, 19680), and support from missionary groups and some colonial administrators, Kiswahili and other local languages in East Africa had their role in education reduced tremendously. As a result, on attainment of independence in the early 1960s, English was the language of instruction from lower primary in Kenya and Uganda. It is only Tanzania that managed to continue using Kiswahili as a language of instruction in the entire primary level of education. However, the language had, and continued to face a lot of negative attention in Uganda where the more populous and influential Baganda people resisted it.

Whereas a lot of gains have been realized, especially in Tanzania as mentioned above, and Kenya where it is now a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education, education language policy is an area that still needs attention. Overall, education has a very big role to play in language development. Because of the heavy premium placed on education by society, the role a particular language plays in its attainment impacts people's attitudes towards the language. In this regard, a language that is used as a medium of instruction acquires higher status in society in comparison to languages that are offered as subjects in a few classes, let alone those with no role whatsoever in the education system. Besides, as rightly pointed out by Huebner (1996) education is crucial in national development and its quality is determined, in part, by language policies in education.

The important role of education in language development is also realized when you consider that languages used in education are constantly developed through research, terminology development and publishing in order to enable them meet changing educational needs. Furthermore, since education systems do affect the attitudes that its graduates develop about different aspects of life, giving African languages a more prominent role will have an effect on the attitudes the young generation develops towards their languages. Another aspect of education to consider is adult education. As pointed out by Mbaabu (1996), one of the indicators of human development is the rate of adult literacy. In this regard, Africa's attempts to reduce the very high adult illiteracy rate have achieved very limited success. This will not change any time soon as long as we do not utilize African languages more as the medium of adult education. One cannot dispute the observation made by Adegbija (1992: 232) that education is a critical domain that requires language policy, owing to its long term and life-long implications. Policies that give African languages a bigger role in education systems in Africa are required urgently by most African nations.

The media, owing to its wide reach and power to influence opinion, is an important ingredient in any development endeavour. The media does not only inform, it also directs and shapes people's viewpoints. The media also contributes to language development. By deciding to use particular languages from a very wide choice in Africa, media houses do make important statements. Languages preferred by media houses often acquire more

prestige and status in society. It is in this respect that the media is thought to have greatly aided the spread of Kiswahili. The language has a heavy media presence both in East Africa and the rest of the world. However, as argued by Mohochi (2003), the media has not utilized half the potential of African languages to move the development process in Africa. Referring to Kenya, he points out that most important national and regional debates are conducted in English in total exclusion of the masses.

While there are a few media companies that use Kiswahili and other African languages in Kenya and Uganda, by far the large percentage uses English. It is only in Tanzania that Kiswahili has much more visibility in the media than any other language. Almost all radio and television stations in that country use Kiswahili compared to Kenya where only three use it exclusively. Kenya has only one Daily Newspaper in Kiswahili while Tanzania has several (close to a hundred). The situation is not any better in Uganda although a few local languages, for example Luganda, have a strong media presence. Due to liberalization, the media industry has witnessed tremendous growth in East Africa. Many privately owned publishing and broadcasting companies have been established. Welcome as that development may be, closer regulation would go a long way in making this expansion yield the expected benefits. With regard to language, the three East African states, and indeed others in Africa, need to have a clear media language policy. The content carried by the media companies is often very valuable but if carried in a language not understood, no communication can be said to have taken place. There should be a policy that compels privately owned media companies to carry a certain per cent of its programmes in African languages.

Elsewhere, Mohochi (2005) puts forward a case for a wider role for African languages in the quest for closer integration in Africa, both in regional groupings and in the African Union. He says that reliance on foreign languages to the exclusion of the greater population, limits their participation in the development process. Open and more accessible discussions, in local languages, will help to make people understand and appreciate the need for closer ties with their neighbours, some who they may have had constant feuds with and regard suspiciously. In so far as decision making remains a preserve of the elite in society without involving the masses, no meaningful integration can be achieved.

In the public service and general government operations, it is worth noting that apart from Tanzania which uses Kiswahili and English in that order, Kenya and Uganda uses English more in the transaction of official government business. The public service functions in English, and most official political discourse is in English too. People, educated and uneducated have a right to information about the running of their affairs by their leaders, and deserve an opportunity to seek and receive public service in a manner they can understand. That is not usually the case and again, the culprit is bad language policies. It is common practice in Kenya to see national leaders read long speeches in English on important national and international holidays to a mammoth crowd in complete disregard of the fact that most, though clapping widely, have no idea what it is all about. They then speak in Kiswahili or other local languages for a few minutes, most of the time not even referring to the speech, but touching more on “juicy” political

arguments of the time. Most of those in attendance will go home happy but those are usually good opportunities to clearly explain various significant policies to our people that are lost. Fortunately, this trend is reversible if we adopt language policies that are people centered.

The proposed Kenyan Draft Constitution gives Kiswahili official status alongside English. Article 9 (2) states “the official languages of Kenya are Kiswahili and English, and all official documents shall be made available in both languages.” This is a good development because experience elsewhere shows that legislation plays an important role in language development. For instance, the declaration of Maori as an official language of New Zealand in August 1987 (Karetu, 2000) significantly boosted the Maori development efforts. With the legislation, government funded structures were put in place to develop the language. We expect similar consequences for Kiswahili should the constitution finally see the light of day. The only Sub-Saharan Africa country that has a clearly stated language policy favourable to African languages is South Africa. There is need to strive to achieve the same for several other African languages.

Conclusion

Speaking about Maori language in New Zealand, Karetu (2000:29) says:

....it is after all, my language and my culture that gives my country its identity on the world stage and that makes it the unique country that it is.....

The same is true about our various African languages, which together contribute in giving our continent its identity in the world. However, they continue to be disregarded. This cannot be allowed to continue, and the effects that it has had on our people, and their struggles to live better lives must be reversed. Success in our development process cries for the development of African languages. How else do we expect to enhance popular participation without addressing the role of the people in the whole process? How do we expect people to accept and follow development programmes if they feel alienated from the processes of their inception and elaboration? Is it not true that project implementation will be easier if those for whom it is intended feel a sense of ownership? In order to be able to achieve that, we need to start talking to our people in languages they can understand. The establishment of a culture of vertical communication between the leaders and the rest of the populace by utilizing our abundant linguistic resources is not optional. The right of a people to participate in the formulation of decisions that affect their very existence is a basic one that need not continue to be denied by pursuing unfavourable language policies in Africa in the 21st century.

As shown, African nations require comprehensive language policies that give indigenous languages space and important functions in society. Important areas to consider include education, the media, public administration, and regional cooperation. There is no doubt that appropriate policies will change the way society views these languages. They will be taken more seriously and students will study them with the same vigour use in other subjects considered important. They will contribute to success and socio-economic

mobility, and will no longer be seen as a preserve for the uneducated who cannot speak English, French, and Portuguese. More importantly, they will ensure enhanced popular participation in Africa's development process. Granted, Africa has far too many languages and enormous resources would be required to develop all of them, but who said good things are cheap. In any case, we are not compelled to deal with the thousands of them at once. A good starting point would be developing those African languages that are cross-ethnic and have a wider base of speakers in particular regions.

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