

The Linguistic Factor and the Millennium Development Goals: A Lesson for Future Sustainable Development in Kenya

Mary, K. Lonyangapuo¹, Ph.D.

Abstract

This paper looks at why the MDGs were never fully achieved by the year 2015; with a focus on Kenya; and the lessons learned for future sustainable development. Specifically, it focuses on the place given to language in the implementation of the set goals. The hypothesis in the current work is that language factor is so important that it cannot be ignored in any sustainable developmental agenda. Failure to take cognizance of this is synonymous to planning to fail. This assumption follows from history which has proven that economies that have succeeded in the past in implementing their developmental agenda had to get this fact right. This is because development relies on knowledge and knowledge is created and disseminated through language. This knowledge only becomes relevant when it is disseminated through the most effective and efficient means; that is, in a language that is well understood by the target population. Data that is used in the analysis is provided by 8 policy makers, 8 policy implementers; that is, technocrats and 20 citizens (from five Counties); who are all purposively selected. Findings show that the non- utilization of the generated knowledge, which is caused by low receptive rate, that derives from the type of medium that is used negatively worked against the achievement of the MDGs in Kenya. With lessons learned from the implementation of the MDGs, the paper proposes that for the existing and future developmental agenda (including the achievement of the SDGs), policy makers as well as development partners have to consider language as a paramount strategy in the implementation plan; if they have to succeed. It is argued that the starting point has to be in education, where quality and equity is ensured through a common and well understood linguistic system. This study is guided by the constructivism theory of learning that was proposed by Dewey (1916), Piaget (1950), and Vigotsky (1978).

Keywords: Communication, Development, Education, Goals, Mother tongue, Knowledge

Introduction

MDGs are a Universal framework for development by member states that were to be achieved by 2015. In September 2000, 189 world leaders attended the Millennium summit at the United Nations and made a commitment to address the world's most pressing development needs by 2015. Leaders pledged to eliminate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve Universal Primary education, promote gender inequality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV and Aids, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development.

A pilot program was done in a few countries. This was a comprehensive assessment of how far these countries had gone with regard to the achievement of the MDGs. For most of them, there was evidence that mechanisms had been put in place to ensure that MDGs are achieved. However, despite this, many questions still stand unanswered long after the due date for the achievement of the MDGs. Some of these questions include:

- i) How many children have access to *quality* education?
- ii) How many are unemployed and live below poverty line?
- iii) How many children under five are still dying in rural areas because they cannot access free immunization?

¹ Moi University, Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages, P.o Box 3900- 30100, Eldoret- Kenya

- iv) How much of the population still has no access to clean water?
- v) What is the percentage of the poor as compared to that of the rich?
- vi) How much effort has been put into the sustainability of the environment?
- vii) How balanced is the partnership between the developed and the developing nations.

With regard to education for instance, stakeholders in most developing multilingual African nations acknowledged that there were problems facing the education sector at the time and that they needed to be addressed in order for the MDGs to be achieved. Such included financial challenges, lack of resources and insufficient learning facilities. What is interesting is that language issue was never mentioned as being a challenge that required attention. The same goes for the other MDGs, where strategies for the implementation of the set goals were put in place, but language as a significant factor in the achievement of the same was ignored. This paper argues that ignoring the language factor by Kenya (and by extension, other multilingual African nations) in the effort to achieve the MDGs was a big mistake because the language of communication has implications to a nation's economic, social, cultural and political development.

Likewise, this paper argues that for developing multilingual nations to have fully achieved the MDGs, all citizens needed to have been involved. Such involvement would only have been possible if citizens had a level ground that is based on an education that offers equal opportunity. Such is an education that is provided in a language that is best understood by all. If this had been done, the milestones made with regard to the MDGs would have been different.

Aim

This paper aims at making a critic on the achievement of the MDGs in Kenya with specific reference to the language factor.

Objectives

1. To show the relevance of language in the achievement of the MDGs.
2. To advocate for the use of the people's language in future developmental agenda.

Assumptions

1. The type of language used by a nation in the construction of knowledge determines its development.
2. For Kenya to have fully achieved the MDGs by 2015, language, among other factors needed to have been given priority.

Rationale

Most multilingual African nations came up with strategies of how to achieve the MDGs by the year 2015. Such included the call for debt cancellation, increased monetary assistance by developed partners, strengthened partnership, increased investment in agriculture, provision of free and compulsory primary school education, sensitization on the importance of girl child education, training of health workers as well as provision of immunization to all children. However, as much as these strategies were good enough, they didn't bear much fruit as is evident years after the target year 2015. In achieving the MDGs or any development agenda, knowledge construction is paramount and this requires language as a significant tool for use in the creation and dissemination process; the outcome of which determines how much is successfully consumed by the target audience. The degree of knowledge consumption in turn determines their level of engagement in developmental agenda. Countries like Japan and China are good evidence to the fact that sustainable technological, economical, social as well as political development can only thrive in an environment where the people's language is acknowledged and given its rightful place and not excessive reliance on foreign languages. A lesson learned from such nations (by multilingual African nations) is the need to rethink about the place given to their indigenous languages in matters national development. In analyzing the achievement of the MDGs up and until 2015, the paper seeks to suggest an additional and yet forgotten element that is key in accomplishing any developmental agenda; whether present or future.

Theoretical Framework

This research adapted the constructivism theory of learning; whose proponents include Dewey (1916), Piaget (1950), and Vigotsky (1978). According to the theory, learning always builds on knowledge that a learner already has.

This knowledge is called schema and because all learning is filtered through pre-existing schemata, constructivists suggest that learning is more effective when a learner is actively engaged in the learning process rather than attempting to receive knowledge passively. Such active engagement is only possible if the same is done in a language that is well understood by the target group. With regard to the same, Piaget (1950) says, people construct new knowledge from their experience. They incorporate new knowledge into their existing 'framework' of knowledge without changing that framework. Piaget further says that individuals construct their own understanding of the world and create their own rules and mental models to make sense of their experiences. That individuals need to build their own meaning and that they do this by adjusting their mental models to accommodate new experiences. According to the constructivism theory, principles of learning include the following:

1. Learning is an active process where the learner has to be involved; the learner has to do something.
2. Constructing meaning takes place in the mind; experience is important for learning to take place.
3. Learning involves language; language use influences learning. According to Vigotsky (1978), language and learning are intertwined; and according to Gurain (2005), one's native language is important in learning.
4. Learning is a social activity. Learners should not be isolated from their social interaction because learning is inherently associated with one's connection with other human beings; e.g. teachers, peers family e. t. c.
5. Learning is contextual. Learning does not take place in the abstract. People learn in relation with what is happening, what they know.

The constructivism theory is relevant to the current study as it emphasizes on the need for incoming knowledge being build on the already existing knowledge in order for it to be effective. This is what the present discussion is all about; that is, in communicating the MDGs to the masses and implementing the same, this should have been done based on what the people already knew/ had. For this to happen, the language that is well understood by the masses should have been used to facilitate better comprehension. This is because language not only provides context and meaning but also re-contextualizes content and serves as a vehicle for thought. Given this, if the language that is used to disseminate knowledge is incomprehensible to the recipients, then their thought pattern is negatively affected, hence, they end up responding inappropriately. In other words, there has to be a base on which new knowledge is build; and this can only be ensured by providing such knowledge in a language that is familiar to the target recipients as well as contextualizing the incoming knowledge (especially foreign knowledge) so that it can be readily consumed.

This paper therefore calls for a re-evaluation of the place of language in future developmental agenda in Kenya (and by extension, in multilingual African nations); for its role in development is so significant that it cannot be ignored.

Methodology

The descriptive approach is used in this paper. The data that is used was elicited from three types of samples; 8 policy makers and 8 implementers from relevant ministries in Kenya; namely, Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Trade; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources; Ministry of Public service, Youth and Gender Affairs; Ministry of Mining and finally from the Ministry of Water and Irrigation. These eight Ministries gave data on policy: that is, what needed to be done and how (strategy); with regard to the MDGs. The other sample that was also purposively selected consisted of eight implementers; that is, technocrats from the eight Ministries. These provided data on the implementation process; that is, what was done to achieve the set goals. Finally, twenty citizens, who were neither policy makers nor technocrats (10 literate and 10 illiterate) from five Counties; namely, Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Trans Nzoia, Kakamega and West Pokot; these provided data on their level of awareness and participation in the achievement of the MDGs. In total, 32 respondents participated in the study.

While interviews were used with the last group, questionnaires were given to policy makers and technocrats. Likewise, secondary data from government documents were used. These sets of data inform the findings in the current study.

The Role of Language in Knowledge Creation and Dissemination

In knowledge creation and dissemination, language is paramount; it is the tool that is used, as it enables human beings to think and communicate their thoughts. Given its relevance, the choice that is made with regard to the linguistic code to be used in knowledge construction cannot be ignored.

Besides, how the chosen system is used has implication on the consumption level of the target recipients. Hymes (1972) says, it is possible to grammatically understand someone's language but not understand the real message content because of inability to grasp the set of norms that govern language use. This derives from the fact that semantic structures are cultural based and they are also dependent on individual experiences, which extremely vary. In other words, unintelligibility can arise not just from the type of linguistic code used but also from how it is used.

From our data, it is observed that most of the knowledge that is consumed in most African nations is foreign. Likewise, this knowledge is disseminated via foreign media; mainly, English, French or some other non-indigenous language. The fact that such knowledge is never contextualized, nor disseminated in languages that are well understood by the people, has negatively impacted on the degree of consumption. Consequently, very few have ended up engaging in national development. This partly explains why it was difficult for Kenya and other multilingual African nations to achieve the millennium development goals. Their reliance on imported knowledge that is never contextualized before dissemination, using a medium that is clear and well understood by the targeted audience was and still remains their undoing. West (2004) concurs; the author says that some of the factors that determine knowledge receptivity include language, awareness, time, accessibility, motivation, assumptions and habits. It would have made more sense if policy makers and implementers took into consideration the relevance of language in the achievement of any development agenda; this would have led them to consider the target group (with regard to their language and cultural affiliation) that was to benefit from the MDGs. Such an undertaking would have found its place in the strategies that were formulated in a bid to achieve the set goals by 2015.

As Hymes (1972) puts it, meaning that is derived from words is context bound, hence, what makes sense in one context (for instance, in the West), may not make sense in another (in Africa). This is what Kenya (and by extension, most multilingual African nations) failed to put into account as she strategized towards achieving the MDGs. One of the lessons learned from the performance of the MDGs by the various member nation states is that for any present or future sustainable development, especially in the multilingual African nations, the language aspect must be given priority not just at policy level but also at the implementation stage; failure to which, the developmental agenda may not be fully realized. Thus, contextualized knowledge that is constructed and disseminated in the language that is well understood by the target population should be the driving force for any sustainable development. With regard to the MDGs, there are questions that beg for answers long after the due date; such questions include:

- i) What percentage in Kenya knew about the MDGs during the period of implementation; and what percentage was actively involved in the achievement of the set goals?
- ii) How much did respective member governments do in terms of sensitizing their citizens on the relevance of the MDGs and the need to get involved?

The information provided by the sample indicate that not many citizens in Kenya knew about the MDGs; both the illiterate in the rural settings as well as the literate. The MDGs to a large extent remained a government project, with very few engaged. For the masses to be appropriately involved, they needed to have received information through a system that is familiar to them. In other words, the government needed to have realized that for it to achieve the MDGs, all citizens must be brought on board and in so doing, the starting point should have been the use of the people's language in knowledge construction; this is besides contextualizing the same knowledge for easier reception and utilization.

The same practice is witnessed in institutions of learning. Data shows that in most Kenyan schools as well as institutions of higher learning, there is knowledge construction but in foreign linguistic codes; mainly in English, French or some other language.

Consequently, the product of the education system graduate with an acquired knowledge, which they are unable to effectively disseminate to the masses; this has negative implication on the development of the nation. Most of them do not see the need to translate this knowledge into a system that is familiar to their recipients; and even for the few that may understand the need, they lack the capacity to do so.

What follows is having a knowledgeable population that cannot translate their knowledge into development. Given the scenario, such knowledge becomes useless as it is unutilized. Take an example of a graduate in Dairy farming or Agricultural Economics.

Such a graduate has knowledge but for it to benefit a dairy farmer or an agriculturist in the village, it has to be translated into a code that is familiar to them. By using foreign languages (that they are not quite competent in) to address a population that is incompetent in the same makes the whole process of knowledge sharing futile as no communication takes place. In practice, acquired knowledge is rarely fully disseminated; and because of this, the cycle of unproductivity continues. The outcome of this is having a nation that is unable to ensure food security as much as it has the required knowledge and skill.

There are many researches that have been done by scholars on environmental issues, food security, education, health matters, gender equity e. t. c, which were all areas of concern in the MDGs. Interesting is that as much as great and relevant knowledge has been created in these areas, available data shows that very little has been utilized and that explains why achieving the specific targets as outlined in the MDGs became a tall order for Kenya. The underlying factor that led to this scenario has to do with negligence by the concerned not to act on the findings that researchers come up with as well as the recommendations that are made. However, besides this, non utilization of generated knowledge is also attributed to the use of incomprehensible media in its dissemination. In the long run, this translates into wasted knowledge whose repercussions are seen not just in the non achievement of the MDGs by 2015 but also in the general underdevelopment of the nation. So the question is not so much about lack of relevant knowledge (be it local or foreign) but it is more about policy makers and implementers not being able to come up with suitable strategies that can enable them make use of that which is available. From lessons learnt, future development plans in Kenya need to take into cognizance the language factor as key to her success.

This paper therefore argues for contextualization of relevant foreign knowledge since knowledge creation and dissemination is influenced by social factors, which include language. This is in line with Berger and Luckmann's (1975: 2) claim that, "Knowledge is socially constructed". Likewise, Stein and Ridderstrale (2003: 32) say, "...people's values and beliefs are important; they affect how they interpret knowledge". The sentiments of these scholars confirm to us that for knowledge to be relevant to the targeted group it doesn't have to be imported and disseminated wholesomely but rather it needs to be contextualized for effective interpretation. This is because knowledge is context dependent; it is interpreted differently depending on various parameters. Likewise, knowledge that is locally constructed needs to be made available to the citizens in a language that they understand best. This is significant because it is not just the speaker that determines the meaning of an utterance but also the hearer. So, being able to adapt to the linguistic level (in terms of language type and competence) of the listener is vital for effective communication. Failure to communicate in the language of the targeted population can have negative impact on knowledge dissemination and utilization; and this is what happened in the attempt to achieve the MDGs. Unfortunately, this trend is not just about to end in Kenya and even in other multilingual African nations.

Language, Education and the MDGs

Language, education and development are intertwined. It is not possible to have learning or teaching take place in the absence of communication; and in communicating, language is central to the process. According to UNESCO (1953), education is synonymous with communication; it is an organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning. Among other factors, the success and failure in education is determined by the type of the linguistic system(s) that is/ are used as media of instruction. In other words, the language of learning plays a key role in access to education and its quality (EU Commission, 2002). On the other hand, there is a relationship that holds between education and development; be it social, cultural, economic, political or technological. This is because the more educated an individual or society is, the more advanced they become. Given the interrelationship, the choice of language as the medium of instruction becomes very important as it determines how far a nation goes with regard to development. This is the very reason as to why this paper is analyzing the place given to language in the implementation of the MDGs.

The central argument in the present study is that for the MDGs to be achieved, the language factor needed to have been prioritized as one of the key strategies in the implementation process; failure to which the set goals could not be fully realized by the targeted year 2015; other factors notwithstanding.

The question of language choice in multilingual African nations is quite a challenge. Because of the existence of many languages, most multilingual African nations have settled for the use of foreign languages or lingua francas (that seem neutral to all) in education. This has been done at the expense of the citizens' linguistic rights, which in the process has had repercussions on education in terms of quality and equity; as well as on the general development of most multilingual African nations.

Many scholars have done research on language and education and the majority agrees that a learner becomes more successful when they acquire new knowledge in a familiar code. For instance, Butzcamm (2003; 31) claims that “Successful learners capitalize on the vast amount of linguistic skills and world knowledge that they have accumulated via mother tongue”. Butzcamm’s claim is in line with the constructivism theory, whose emphasis is on the fact that new knowledge is build on the already existing knowledge in an individual. Thus, one learns faster when they pick up from a familiar starting point. With regard to education, this means that giving educational instruction in one’s indigenous language accelerates learning because one doesn’t have to learn the language before learning the concepts but instead, they embark on learning the content as they already know the language. This contrasts with situations where the medium of instruction is foreign (as it is in most multilingual African nations) thereby forcing the learner to learn the language and at the same time, the content. The same argument applies to knowledge dissemination; where people understand the content better and faster when it is communicated in a familiar rather than in an unfamiliar language. Auerbach (1993: 18) is of the same opinion; he says, “When the native language is used, practitioners, researchers and learners consistently report positive results”. This paper argues for an education in one’s mother tongue that ensures many have access to quality education, with good performance; and since education interacts with development, this in the long run translates into many citizens participating in the development agenda of the nation. On the same note, the argument in the current study is that if language that is well understood by the Kenyan citizens was used in the implementation of the various MDGs, then better results would have been registere by 2015. This is in contrast with what was achieved so far by using foreign systems that are neither accessible nor intelligible to all. According to Nuttal (1996: 187):

L1 use is decisive in both teaching and learning of the four skills; that is, reading, writing, speaking and listening. With regard to the concept of language response, this scholar says: Inability to express themselves (students) in the target language necessarily limits both the kind and quality of responses that students give. Students who are permitted to use their L1 in responding will explore the text more accurately and thoroughly than those who are restricted to target language responses.

Nuttal’s (op. cit) (op. cit), claim is in line with the preceding argument that one learns better and faster if taught in one’s own mother tongue. Nazary (2008) is of the same opinion that the first language of the learner (L1) has a necessary and facilitating role in all aspects of language instruction. According to Nazary (op. cit), the student’s L1 is incorporated as a learning tool and as a facilitator for efficient communication. Research has also shown that limited and judicious use of mother tongue in, for instance, the English classroom does not reduce the student’s exposure to English but rather it can assist in the teaching and learning process (Tang, 2002 and Burden, 2001).

The relevance of receiving an education in one’s mother tongue is that it gives equal opportunity to all (regardless of their social background), which in turn facilitates participation in national development. To the contrary, information provided by the sample shows that, mother tongue education has not been quite embraced in Kenya and to make it worse, the majority of the citizens do not have access to the preferred language that is used in education. Consequently, this group of people always misses out on relevant information (be it in academic or otherwise). This population end up not participating actively in the social, political and economic development of the nation. While referring to the UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) says that for the UN’s Education for all (UEFA) to be achieved, education has to be provided in a language that is understood by all; that is, one’s mother tongue; including sign language for the deaf and Braille for the blind. According to this Declaration, language is a basic Human Right, just as basic Education; though denied to the majority in most African nations.

By providing education in a foreign linguistic code, most citizens end up not accessing; and for those that do, most of them do not perform well because of many factors; one among them being the type of language used as the medium of instruction. The consequence of this is a passive population that hardly participates in national development. This partly explains why it was difficult for Kenya and other multilingual African nations (who are member states) failed to achieve the set MDGs by the year 2015.

Similarly, according to the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), “The right of children to learn their mother tongue and continue their education using their mother tongue is not only important for culture, it is essential for their psychological development. It has been shown in many large-scale studies in several countries that if indigenous and minority children have their education mainly using their own languages for the first 6- 8 years, their general school achievement is better and they learn the dominant language better than if their teaching is through the medium of the dominant language”, <http://www.linguistic-rights.org/dokumento/> (UEA)-informilo-UN-Ghenevo-angla.

Ignoring such recommendations by multilingual African nations has had negative repercussions not only to the education sector but also on their overall national development.

Still on mother tongue use, one of the proposals made by the Asmara Declaration is that “All African children have the unalienable right to attend school and learn in their mother tongue. Every effort should be made to develop African languages at all levels...the effective and rapid development of science and technology in Africa depends on the use of African languages. Modern technology must be used for the development of African languages”, <http://www.queensu.ca/snid/amara.htm>. Questions that arise from this include:

- (1) How much effort has been made by Kenya and other multilingual African nations to ensure that children are provided for education in their indigenous languages?
- (2) How much effort is being made towards the development of African indigenous languages?

The information gathered shows that not much is being done to develop and use mother tongues as media of instruction; much emphasis is on foreign languages; while indigenous languages are relegated to subservient functions. For Kenya to experience sustainable development, deliberate effort has to be made to have her indigenous languages used generally.

According to Philipson (1992), the use of English in non-English speaking nations is a form of linguistic imperialism. In their draft concerning the use of English as a medium of instruction, the British Council gave a suggestion that it was in favor of English being used as a medium of instruction across some or all of the curriculum only when children know enough English to be able to deal with it as a medium of instruction. The question that begs is why governments in non-English speaking nations, especially in Africa insist on the use of foreign languages instead of their indigenous languages when there are all indications that the introduction of foreign languages early in life does not facilitate learning? From data provided in this study, it is apparent that the use of English is motivated by the economic advantages that are associated with it. Based on the lessons learned from the MDGs, this paper argues that current and future sustainable development in Kenya will majorly be determined by the value given to the aspect of language in the implementation of any development agenda. Given this, it is important that the government of Kenya and all other stakeholders rethink the type of language that is used as the medium of instruction and the point at which transition to another language is done; since this not only has repercussions on education but also on the general development of the nation.

Language and the MDGs in Kenya

In the process of the implementation of the MDGs, many government leaders argued that their nations were on track towards achieving the MDGs. One such nation was Kenya (Government of Kenya 2005). Of interest is that, in as much as such leaders acknowledged that there were challenges which they faced in the attempt to achieve the Millennium development goals by 2015; none of them mentioned language as being a hindrance to the achievement of set goals. The fact is that besides the challenges mentioned by Kenya (and other member states) as having acted against the full implementation of the MDGs; elicited data shows that the language policy and practice in Kenya played a substantive role that cannot be ignored.

In Kenyan for instance, there are strategies that were put in place with regard to the achievement of the MDGs. With regard to MDG 1, the government put in place strategies that would ensure that poverty and hunger was a thing of the past; this is in recognition of the fact that living and feeding well is a Constitutional right as cited in the KDHS (Kenya Demographic and Health Survey) 2014: 157 report; the report says, “Good nutrition is a prerequisite for national development and for the well-being of individuals. The 2010 Constitution of Kenya recognizes adequate food and nutrition as a human right. It states that every person has the right to be free from hunger and the right to adequate food of acceptable quality (Article 43) and that every child has the right to basic nutrition (Article 53).

Furthermore, the Government of Kenya’s 2011 Food and Nutrition Security Policy state that nutrition is central to human development in the country (Government of Kenya, 2011)”. In order to comply with this constitutional requirement, one of the strategies put in place in an effort to achieve the MDG 1 was to invest more in agricultural production. However, as much as this was and has always been done, there is evidence that Kenya still has a long way to go in ensuring food security as well as productive employment for its citizens. The root cause for this, amongst other causes is her language policy, which is pro-the rich and not the poor, who are the majority in the society.

The common practice has been for the rich to have access to the 'appropriate' and preferred linguistic code (English) and not the less privileged. This code gives them access to a good education, which eventually gives them opportunity for being creative/ innovative; besides getting better jobs. As this happens, the majority of the citizens who have no access to the same linguistic code end up being either unskilled laborers or unemployed. With this scenario, the cycle of poverty and hunger has not changed much and the gap between the rich and the poor has been increasing over the years. Given that the linguistic code of the less privileged does not have economic value, this bars them from accessing education which is key to one's participation in economic development. The fact that the MDG 1 was never fully achieved by 2015 as anticipated, it is time that Kenya re-evaluates her language plan and policy; especially in education. By so doing, majority of the citizens will have access to education and in the long run, they will be able to fully engage in the development of the nation. With regard to the eradication of hunger, Kenya is still unable to comfortably feed her citizens despite the fact that government spending on agriculture has increased over the years (Government of Kenya 2005). The reality is that Kenya as a nation is rich; for she has a lot of resources. The challenge that she grapples with is poor governance and lack of proper planning. For Kenya to sustain herself in terms of food security, she has to embrace good governance, peace and political stability. Besides these, language needs to be given priority as a significant tool in accessing available resources that are central to alleviating poverty and hunger. The linguistic system used to communicate the required knowledge ought to be familiar in order for them to utilize the available knowledge.

With regard to achieving universal primary Education (MDG 2), Kenya has made effort by providing free and compulsory primary education. However, because of limited resources, evidence shows that the quality of what is offered has been compromised. Besides, data also shows that the type of linguistic code that is used as the medium of instruction continually perpetuates inequality in the Kenyan society. Currently in Kenya, children from wealthy families are the ones in good schools (with better infrastructure, teachers and resources) that have access to the 'right linguistic code'. This code enables them to excel in academics as compared to their poor counterparts. More so, the curricular favors them more than the poor. Given the prevailing scenario, we argue that it is not enough to provide free primary education to all as is the case in Kenya but rather provide an education in a language that is accessible to all and of the same quality; that is, either in one's mother tongue; in the various Kenyan Englishes or in the standard English version. As it is, none of these is used; what we have is a mixture of everything that works against the majority of citizens.

Goal 3 is about promoting gender equity and women empowerment. Despite the milestones made so far, efforts to eliminate gender parity in primary and secondary education in Kenya have been met with a myriad of challenges. Societal structures that place men and women in different sub-cultures with different social roles have been a hindrance in the achievement of this goal. Interesting is that even the type of language that is used by the two genders and the way it treats the two, reflects their different social standing; men as the superordinate, while women as the subordinate. The same is translated into education; where data shows that in some of the Kenyan cultures, women are relegated to household chores; while men, to education and outdoor tasks. In such cultures, educating a girl child is synonymous to waste of resources. Despite the improved gender parity over the years, boys still register a higher enrolment rate than the girls; this is more especially in marginalized parts of the country.

According to the analysis (on Enrolment by gender and Gender parity) by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology that was done between 2009 and 2014, it was observed that "In Primary Education, the parity index improved over the period but did not get to parity by 2014 and hence equality is not yet achieved. Despite a real improvement in the gender parity at Secondary Education over the period, the index is still low, it is at 0.92. Thus there are fewer girls than boys at Secondary Education level" MoEST (2014:7). This paper suggests that in strategizing on the implementation of gender equity as well as women empowerment, both cultural and linguistic aspects needed have been considered. Likewise, the linguistic factor needed to have been given priority in the sensitization of the citizens about the need for gender equity.

Such a move, where the masses are involved bears much fruit and is more sustainable as compared to strategies that exclude the target groups in the society, who unfortunately bear the consequences. Doing this would have improved the general status of women as well as giving them opportunity for participation in national development, as their male counterpart; though this is not to say that all men do participate in national development; it is only that their percentage is higher.

As far as MDGs 4, 5, and 6 (on health matters) are concerned, there are milestones that have been made. However, from available information, there is still a long way to go. For instance, the KDHS 2014 report indicates that, “the Division of Family Health in the Ministry of Health is supporting several child survival interventions, including various operational initiatives, to improve the health of children in Kenya. These include the Expanded Program on Immunization, the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses Initiative, the Community-Based Newborn Care Program, the Infant and Young Child Feeding Program, a micronutrient supplementation program, and a vitamin A and de-worming campaign. Biannual child-mother health and nutrition weeks, called ‘Malezi Bora’ in Kiswahili, are also held in May and November to deliver a specific package of health interventions targeting mothers and children under age 5. The ultimate goal of the ‘Malezi Bora’ strategy is to improve delivery of routine health and nutrition services targeting children, expectant women, and lactating mothers”, pg 139. This is a positive initiative undertaken by the Kenyan government, a step towards achieving the set MDGs. However, if only such information on health matters was readily available to the concerned groups in languages that are best understood by them, then much would have been achieved. The KDHS 2014 report attests to this; the report says, “The ability of women to access information, make decisions, and act effectively in their own interests or in the interests of those who depend on them is essential to their empowerment. If women, who are the primary caretakers of children are empowered, then the health and survival of their children will be enhanced”, (pg 288). What is missing is the ‘ability to access information’. For instance, the KDHS report of 2014 shows that “Maternal deaths represent about 14% of all deaths among women age 15-49. The percentage of female deaths that are maternal varies by age from about 5% among women age 45-49 to 27% among women age 25-29”, (KDHS report of 2014:329). The fact is that among young children, there are still many deaths that are caused by malaria, measles, diarrhea and pneumonia.

This is especially so in rural areas, where poverty and illiteracy is high. However, this is bound to change significantly, especially with the launch of the ‘Beyond Zero Campaign’ (that was meant to improve on maternal and child health in Kenya) by the First Lady Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta. Data show that the number of women that give birth at home has radically reduced and as such the number of deaths that occur during child birth have proportionately reduced even in rural areas where such deaths were rampant before. With regard to the spread of HIV/ AIDS pandemic, the information presented shows that the government has made effort to deal with the vice. However, the impact is mainly noticeable in urban areas especially among the elite and not in the urban slum and rural settings. This is observed from researches done so far on HIV prevalence. For instance, Madise et al (2012) says, a survey of nearly 3000 men and women was conducted in two Nairobi slums in Kenya between 2006 and 2007, where respondents were tested for HIV status. In addition, data from the 2008/2009 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey were used to compare HIV prevalence between slum residents and those living in other urban and rural areas. The results showed strong intra-urban differences. HIV was 12% among slum residents compared with 5% and 6% among non-slum urban and rural residents, respectively. The government’s effort in providing drugs and increasing financial allocation to the health sector is much appreciated. Further, studies have shown that women are more vulnerable to the pandemic as compared to men; and of course the epidemic is still here with us. The Kenya HIV County Profile (2016:1) has shown that “Women in Kenya are more vulnerable to HIV infections compared to Kenyan men, with the national HIV prevalence at 7.0% for women and 4.7% for men as per the 2015 HIV Estimate report”.

The high burden of HIV and AIDS in Kenya accounts for an estimated 29% of annual adult deaths, 20% of maternal mortality, and 15% of deaths of children under the age of five. The epidemic has also negatively affected the country’s economy by lowering per capital output by 4.1%. Kenya has an estimated 71,034 new HIV infections among adults and about 6,613 new infections among children annually. Further, in the Economic Survey 2017: 60 report, HIV/AIDS and Malaria (areas of concern in the MDGs) are listed among major causes of deaths in the recent past. The report states, “pneumonia followed by Malaria, Cancer and HIV/AIDS continue to be the leading causes of death, collectively accounting for 32. 9% of all reported deaths.”

These statistics are worrying, despite improvement in the Kenyan Health sector. Based on these statistics, we argue in the current study that for the Kenyan government to have had sustainable impact in the Health sector (as envisaged in the MDGs); she needed to have considered the role of language in dealing with health matters. This argument is based on the fact that in most cases those that are charged with responsibilities in the health sector lack competence in the language that is well understood by their clients; this is despite having the requisite professional knowledge in their areas specialization.

For instance, the data provided shows that most of the professionals are unable to teach mothers on nutrition as well as antenatal matters; neither are they able to adequately articulate themselves on matters HIV/AIDS in a language that is well understood by their clients; the latter is worsened by the cultural aspect that acts as an impediment, Lonyangapuo (2014).

The few that attempt to use mother tongue fail to communicate either because they cannot articulate certain linguistic items in their mother tongue or they totally have no competence in their various indigenous languages. This is why the current study has the assumption that if a linguistic code that is familiar was competently (and without any reservations) used to sensitize the masses about the pandemic, then many victims would have escaped the vice; and of course the general trend in the health sector would have been different. A case in point has to do with the documents on health matters; such documents need to be written in a language that the target group is familiar with. Likewise, counseling sessions need to be done in a communicative medium that the audiences are conversant with. The question that we grapple with is: How many health professionals are equipped to provide health services in a language other than the one they are trained in, which apparently is foreign? The reality is that most of them have received their training in English and it is only in English that they can disseminate the knowledge which they have acquired. With regard to Kiswahili, there are very few professionals that can express themselves competently in this language and yet the majority of Kenyans perfectly comprehend Kiswahili. Given the scenario, many health workers have the knowledge but they are unable to translate the same to a level where it can be comfortably and effectively consumed. Consequently, many deaths occur yearly; especially among the poor; this has negatively affected the general development of the nation.

With regard to environmental sustainability (MDG7), the story is the same; poverty and ignorance has contributed to environmental degradation in Kenya. So far, from the information gathered, it is evident that not many are informed about the need to conserve the environmental; especially in rural areas as well as among the urban slum dwellers. As it is, either no information has been provided or it has been provided but in a language that is not understood by the recipients. Consequently, many have remained uninformed; hence, they cannot effectively participate in the conservation effort. Likewise, because of rampant poverty among many Kenyans, greed among the rich as well as ignorance about the need to conserve the environment, not many would see the need to conserve the environment when they can benefit from it for their immediate needs. From the EPI (Environmental Performance Ranking) (2014), Kenya's overall ranking in environmental sustainability was position 140 out of 178 countries, scoring 36.99, which is 13.96%, far below average. As it were, with other MDGs, embracing language as one of the strategies in achieving environmental sustainability would have been a positive move. In other words, (regardless of where the country is with regard to environmental sustainability) all need to be involved; citizens need to be educated on the relevance of environmental sustainability in a language that is familiar to them.

This paper supports MDG8; that is, develop a global partnership for development. However, in as much as developing nations partner with the developed in an effort to improve on their development status, it all depends on the individual nation's effort. With regard to Kenya, it is about Kenya as a nation and her people that the nation will make a step towards sustainable development. As argued before, language plays a central role in the development of a Nation and as such, the language aspect needs to be entrenched in all future developmental agenda; and the starting point for this is in education since there is a relationship that holds between language, education and development (Rassool 2007); as the medium that is used in education determines how far a nation goes with regard to achieving sustainable development.

Language Policy and Practice in Kenya and the MDGs

According to the constitution that was promulgated in October, 2010, there are two official languages in Kenya; that is, English and Kiswahili, and all official documents are supposed to be written in both languages. The national language on the other hand is Kiswahili. Further, the constitution gives the state the responsibility of respecting and protecting the diversity of all the languages in the country. The State is also charged with the responsibility of promoting the development and use of Kiswahili, indigenous languages, sign language and Braille.

It is also stated under the Bill of Rights, Article (44) that:

Everyone has a Right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of his or her choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of this Bill of rights.

The constitution also recognizes culture as the foundation of a nation and it directs that the state promotes all forms of cultural expressions through literature, art, traditional celebrations, science, communication, information, mass media, publications, libraries and other cultural heritage. However, despite such provisions, little effort has been put in towards achieving this. On the contrary, it is English, a non-indigenous language that is respected, protected and promoted. This is observed in the position that English enjoys, especially in education and other formal settings as compared to indigenous languages. Currently, English is introduced as a medium of instruction (in most urban schools) right from the commencement of a child's education; while in most rural schools, it is Kiswahili that is mainly used as a medium of instruction in early years. There are very few schools in rural areas that use mother tongue instruction in the first three years of learning. Despite the fact that the government of Kenya has tried in this, no tangible impact can be seen in mother tongue use in education (as stipulated in the constitution); leave alone in other formal settings. Consequently, the right to one's use of language as stipulated in the Kenyan Constitution has been violated; and this has had far reaching consequences on her overall development agenda.

According to the Ministry of Education (1994), English is taught and learned in order to achieve the following objectives:

- i) To develop the learners' intellectual power.
- ii) To increase the learners' understanding on how language works
- iii) To teach the learner to learn a language so that he can do research in.
- iv) To bring the learner to a better understanding of international issues.

The question that begs is whether one's mother tongue cannot be used to achieve the above objectives? The preference for English over indigenous languages (though it has benefited the nation in some way), has to some extent worked against Kenya as a nation; especially with regard to sustainable development; whose basis is in total engagement of the concerned populace. Currently, most citizens lack the information that is required for such involvement. This information can only be available for consumption if it is delivered to them in a familiar linguistic code.

The language of instruction is quite significant because its command is not only central to communication processes in the classroom but also to the acquisition of knowledge by the learner. Given its relevance, full competence in the language of instruction is critical for good performance in the learners' academics. However, data shows that most English teachers are not quite competent in the language of instruction; hence, their contribution to the learners' success in education is limited. This is mainly observed in rural areas, where more often than not the language teacher ends up either code mixing, switching or using Sheng in order to communicate. The outcome of this has been having products that are as well incompetent in the language of instruction; an aspect that negatively impacts on their academic performance; which later on translates into non-participation in the national development agenda. This argument concurs with the report released by PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) (2000: 379). According to this report:

The main reason for educational disadvantage of students is mastery of English language which is the service language in education system. The linguistic deficit among students impacts all other subjects. People with insufficient level of reading competence are handicapped in acquisition of competency in all academic fields. As long as the medium of instruction is foreign, African students will be a language minority in their own African schools.

The existing scenario is reversible; all it requires is political will. Reverting to a medium of instruction that is friendlier to the learners; and embracing the same at all levels of the implementation of the nation's development agenda will positively contribute to sustainable development as many will have the opportunity to participate. This is as opposed to the present, where those that have received an education in English seem to have an advantage over those that lack the same.

This paper argues that if mother tongue were used as stipulated in the Kenyan constitution; including its use in functional domains such as in the provision of training as well as in the implementation of the set goals, a better performance in attaining the set goals would have been registered as compared to what was achieved by the close of 2015.

Training in a familiar language cannot be underscored as it prepares one to efficiently disseminate the acquired knowledge. Likewise, this increases the percentage of those that participate in development; not to mention increased chances of sustainability of the same.

This is what the Kenyan government needed to have done; she should have taken as priority the relationship that holds between language and the achievement of the MDGs; and by extension, any future sustainable development; for that matter. Supporting the development and use of indigenous languages generally as proposed in the Kenyan Constitution will go a long way in ensuring future sustainable development. However, for this to happen (and having learned lessons from the MDGs), policy makers need to integrate the language issue in their strategic plan that is aimed at giving a road map towards any future sustainable development. Specifically, the government needs to consider the role of the learners' L1 in education; particularly in early childhood and primary education. Dutcher and Tucker (1996) gives an example of the research that was done in Nigeria on the use of mother tongue. From the findings, it is shown that teaching in the learners' mother tongue or in a language familiar to them speeds up the learning of reading and writing; it leads to genuine literacy.

With regard to the use of one's own language in instruction, many multilingual African nations have consistently cited the various challenges that make mother tongue education a near impossible attempt. Some of the challenges mentioned include; training of teachers in the various indigenous languages as well providing educational materials. This is a reality that cannot be underestimated. However, as earlier indicated, these challenges can be overcome as long as there is the will; and especially, political will. There are examples of African nations that have traded on the same path with noticeable results; these include South Africa, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Ghana, Uganda, Chad and Namibia (Dutcher and Tucker, 1996). If this had been done in Kenya, then equality in education as well as quality of what is offered would have been realized; and this would have been a step towards the achievement of the MDGs. Unfortunately, not much has been done so far, even with a clear understanding of the relevance of the language of education. Given the lessons learned from the MDGs, Kenya as a nation needs to realize that future sustainable development is partially pegged on the place that language is given in developmental strategies.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at why the MDGs were never fully realized in Kenya by 2015. It has specifically focused on the linguistic aspect as having substantially contributed to this. The paper has argued that for Kenya to have fully achieved the set MDGs, the linguistic aspect needed to have been considered as one among the strategies used in the implementation process; that focus should have been on the dissemination of information in a linguistic code that is familiar to the citizens. This conclusion is based on the fact that information that is disseminated in a foreign media is only consumed by a few; mainly the elite and not the majority of the citizens, who are directly affected by the decisions that are made by policy makers. Lack of relevant information explains the non-participation of the majority of the citizens in national development.

It has also been shown in this paper that the use of English as the main medium of instruction in Kenya has contributed to poor quality as well as inequality in education. This is because the majority of the citizens have no access to this 'right' linguistic code. Consequently, for years, many have ended up dropping out of school because of non-performance (despite having free primary education) (Kembo-Sure et al 2006). This translates into either partial or total non participation in the development of the nation. Given this scenario, there is urgent need for a policy on the language of education in Kenya; a policy that will ensure that all Kenyans have access to quality education (education that is offered on the same platform) and they all equally participate in the development of the nation as they benefit from the same. This conclusion is based on numerous studies whose findings have shown that there is a link between language, education and development.

It has also been shown that contextualization of foreign knowledge is important if such knowledge is to be relevant. So, besides focusing on the linguistic code that is used to disseminate knowledge, any imported knowledge needs to be contextualized for it to be fully consumed by the recipients; otherwise, such knowledge ends up being irrelevant.

Finally, this paper acknowledges the effort made by the government with regard to achieving the set MDGs; this includes, the provision of free and compulsory primary education, immunization for young children, provision of drugs, more allocation of funds to agriculture and other relevant sectors as well as a call for more funding from international communities; just to mention a few. However, besides these, inclusion of the linguistic aspect as an important strategy towards achieving the MDGs would have added more value. For future sustainable development in Kenya, provision of information in a language that is familiar to the citizens needs to be given priority.

Recommendation

Studies need to be carried out in developed nations in order to establish the role played by language in the achievement of their developmental goals. Findings from such studies are beneficial in dealing with issues of language, education and development in developing nations. This is despite the multilingual nature of the later.

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