

Achieving Millennium Development Goals in Africa through Indigenous Language-Public Health Policy in Africa: A case Study of Àbèsàbèsì¹ speaking community

Taiwo Opeyemi Agoyi

Department of Linguistics and Languages, Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.

agoyito@live.com

Abstract: *In September 2000 The United Nations sets “eight goals as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)”. The goals are: “to commit world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women” which are prevailing in Africa. Each goal “has target set for 2015, and indicators to monitor the implementation of the set goals from 1990 levels. In realizing the goals a sound mind needs to be in a sound body, this explains the direction of many of the goals towards achieving health for all. This paper examines the relevance of Local Languages and culture in realizing the MDGs in rural communities. Specifically rural cultural practices such as ensure that water sources are kept pure. This practice resonates in a pound called ‘Èbùge’ by Àbèsàbèsì language speakers. The practice reveals that traditionally the people are conscious of hygiene. If such cultural approach is adopted as expressed through the languages spoken in the rural communities, there will be less cost, stress and reduction in mismanagement of public resources and manpower.*

Keywords: *Language, hygiene, culture, Yoruba, Àbèsàbèsì, water, Taboo*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mwabu (2008:1) listed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to include eradication of poverty, attainment of universal primary Education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction in child mortality, improving material health combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing global partnerships for development.

Wagstaff et al (2006) state that the focus of MDGs on health is to achieve significant reduction on the effect the listed health related problems have on the public in member states.

They examine the ‘interventions for public health through health production function’ which includes ‘effective mechanisms for financing the interventions... with a focus on the role of social health insurance’ as a way of achieving MDGs in Africa.

Wagstaff et al made some observations that are of interest to us in this paper, they are: that policy makers should pay attention to ‘efficient management of the overall economy in pursuit of health or any of the MDGs’ and that policies for achieving MDGs must be formulated and implemented on the basis of sound research’. They opine that unacceptable inequalities in health care and health outcome can arise from the allocation of health services and products that promote the achievement of health in MDGs on the basis of the ability to pay. To them, ‘equity in health care and health outcome is probably the most important consideration in the design and implementation of interventions for achieving MDGs’. Unlike the lip city focused health services and product in third world countries it will give a true picture of the health services and products across all facets of any country thereby achieving the health for all policy. They suggest mechanisms for ensuring broad-based distribution of health which include improving inputs and technologies in societies.

In literature there are research reports on health care services and products in Africa which date from 1960 where health services are provided and financed mainly with revenue from general taxation,

¹ Agoyi 2008 suggested the name Àbèsàbèsì for the language known in literature as Akpes with Ethnologic identity ibe

supplemented by income fees. The health service provided from generated fund is popular among the privileged salary earners and people with western education. A shift to health insurance has no much impact because it covers a tiny section of the population'. The situation worsened with structural adjustment programme introduced in 1980s and 1990s which made financing the health policy difficult, the resulting effect is a setback on the policy implementation. African nations adopted the strategy of de-emphasizing financing health care with the 'user fees' but encourage ability to pay for health services and products policy there by encouraging 'user charge fees'. For financial reasons and efficacy of medication, majority of the population in rural areas resolve to patronize the pre-1960s health care provision, that is, traditional medication. Government policies in African countries have since legalized the traditional health care provision to supplement modern health care services. All available literature and discussions on the MDGs as far as I know, are on assessing fund for health care for either 'user charged fees' as applicable in most African countries. Researchers do not focus on the possible steps to prevent diseases using language as a tool to touch the rural dwellers. The paper explores the value of language and culture in achieving the MDGs.

1.1. Language

Culture expressed in language is the totality of man's life. We share Sapir (1958:10)'s view that "language has certain psychological qualities which make it peculiarly important...language is felt to be a perfect symbolic system in a perfect homogeneous medium, for the handling of all references and meanings that a given culture is capable of making. These may be inform of actual communications or in that of such ideal substitutes of communication as thinking". To him the content of every culture is expressible in its language and there are no linguistic materials whether as to the content or form, not felt to symbolize actual meaning, whatever may be the attitude of those who belong to other cultures". Using Trudgill (1988:14) words, "Language is not simply a means of communicating information about the weather or any other subject. It is also a very important means of establishing or maintaining relationship with other people". The views of these scholars underscore the importance of language in establishing and maintaining a human society. The values and norms of the society are established or set up consciously and unconsciously by the way of life and need to maintain and control the members of the society. The above observation is collaborated in Forrester Michael A (1997:1) who opines that 'using language in every context is, for most of us, similar to using our bodies- we don't think about it unless we have to – and we rarely remember how we learned to do so in the first place". The implication of this is that as culture is imbibed by the individual child in a community or society, it is verbalized unconsciously as the individual grows. Words are spoken only when needed by the language speakers. Language is the tool used by the society to encourage the right behavior on the one hand; and on the other hand, it is also the tool to discourage wrong acts in the society. Hanna and Harrison (2004:171-172) opine that a society is "a collection of people whose habit mesh with one another in ways so patterned as to serve the purpose of promoting ends to all and advantageous to all". In their view "habit of different speakers" of a language "mesh in such a way as to promote the achievement of a certain common advantage..... advantage of one speaker's being able to guide another's actions at a distance, merely by uttering a word". The above view underscores the value of language in shaping human attitude and behavior for individual advantage and the society in general. Any theme can be the subject of discussion. In human societies, emphases are laid on words that best express the paramount value or topmost need or ideas the speaker wants the hearer to be conscious of. In Africa it is generally believed that words are sacred. The spoken word of man portrays his person. The above view is expressed in Yorubas believe that in statement such as *Òrò tí a bá n tẹnu mọ bí ò dun ni, ó n dùn m'óni ni*. Meaning, when a speaker is fond of a view, it implies he has pleasure in it or that it is impacting negatively in his emotions. This Yoruba view is in line with the biblical saying that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks". From the foregoing, it is presumed that every human society especially African society, values word spoken in a language member of the community will be able to decode. In essences, the cultural value of a group or society is expressed in the language (Sapir 1958). The above phenomenon in relation to public health policy as shown in Yoruba an African language is discussed in the next subsection.

2. YORUBA PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY AS PORTRAYED IN THE LANGUAGE

Yoruba as a nation values good health. The value is expressed in the common say as *ilera loògùn orò*, that is health is an antidote to riches. Yoruba has a way of discouraging dirty/bad habits using wise saying and proverbs. There are lexical words like *ẹgbin* 'dirty habit' as portrayed in the works of D. O

Fagunwa. In *Ògbójú ọ̀dẹ̀ Nínú Igbó Irímọ̀lẹ̀*, ‘Forest of Ten Thousand Demons’ Fagunwa’s description of the muster gives irritating picture to readers. It sends message to every reader on the Yoruba societal view of *ẹ̀gbìn* ‘dirty habit’:

1. orúko rẹ̀ a mǎ jẹ̀ Ẹ̀gbìn. Kí a tó ri on papa ni a ti bẹ̀rẹ̀si igbõrun rẹ̀. Ẹ̀yin ọ̀rẹ̀ mi, lati oju ti mo ti

de inu aiyẹ̀ nkò ba iru ohun irira bi ọ̀kunrin yi pade ri: gbogbo ọ̀mọ̀ ika eṣẹ̀ rẹ̀, kiki jiga ni, awọ̀n jiga nǎpọ̀ tobẹ̀ ti nwọ̀n ge pupọ̀ ninu awọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ ika eṣẹ̀ nǎ nwọ̀n si tò si i lati atẹ̀lẹ̀ṣẹ̀ de oronkun, ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ninu wọ̀n a mǎ tikaarẹ̀ yọ̀ sílẹ̀ bi on ba tinrin lọ. Oriṣiriṣi ọ̀ju lo wà ni eṣẹ̀ rẹ̀ ewe ni on si fi mǎ nbò wọ̀n loju nitori eyiti o ba kere jù ninu wọ̀n lo mọ̀ bi atẹ̀lẹ̀wọ̀ mi; ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ninu awọ̀n ọ̀ju nǎ ni on kò fi nkankan bo nitori ewe kekere kò ka wọ̀n, nwọ̀n a mǎ ṣe omi pẹ̀lu ẹ̀tu bi o ba ti nkoja. Ẹ̀gbìn ki inu idi bi o ba yagbẹ̀ ẹ̀pa imi ati ọ̀dun mẹ̀ta mbẹ̀ ni iho idi rẹ̀; bi o ba duro awọ̀n arǎn ati jẹ̀dijẹ̀di a mǎ jade ni idi rẹ̀ nwọ̀n a mǎ ri i ni ara ka on a si mǎ fi ọ̀wọ̀ fa wọ̀n kuro ni ẹ̀gbẹ̀ rẹ̀; bi o ba mǎ yagbẹ̀ ki ibẹ̀rẹ̀ ki isi iduro ni oju kan, a mǎ yagbẹ̀ bi o ba ti nrin lọ imi a mǎ ja si i ni eṣẹ̀ a si mǎ ja si i ni itan. Onirũru ọ̀wo ati ileroro ni o yi ọ̀kunrin nǎ ka ọ̀kọkan won tobi ju eṣẹ̀ mi lọ, nwọ̀n a mǎ tu si i lara on a si mǎ fi ọ̀wọ̀ ba omi wọ̀n a mǎ fi i si ẹ̀nu. Ẹ̀gbìn ki iwẹ̀: ẹ̀wo ni. Ipin oju rẹ̀ dabi ẹ̀bi ẹ̀niti o jẹ̀ ẹ̀ko, a mǎ rùn bi ẹ̀ran ti nrà a si mǎ ṣe idin jade. Ọ̀run rẹ̀

dabi ara ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀ ẹ̀ri aiyebaiye si lẹ̀ mọ̀ ọ̀: o dudu bi ọ̀ṣẹ̀. Ekolo, ejo akẹ̀kẹ̀ati onirũru ẹ̀da afaiyafa ni imǎ jade lẹ̀nu rẹ̀ bi o ba nsọ̀ro, on a si mǎ jẹ̀ wọ̀n bi onjẹ̀ nigbati ebi ba de si i. Ikun kò lẹ̀ tan ni imu Ẹ̀gbìn lailai on ni ifi ṣe omi wa ounjẹ̀ oun ni isi imu bi omi. (Fágúnwà D. O 2005:67 ed)

Translation

His name is Dirty habit. We started sensing the odor of his body afar off. Friends, I have never sited such irritating creature in my life. Countless jiggers / chigoes-flea like swarm of flies feeds on his toes, starting from his kneel to the toes germ are visible. His legs are full of broken ligament that are as wide as my palm, it was not possible for him to cover many of the injured parts of the legs because they were very wide which he always cover with leaves, mucus always drop from the injured parts of the legs as he moves. The creature *ẹ̀gbìn* does not always clean up after toileting. Feces not cleaned for long time form layers at the anus, worms are seen dropping freely from the anus as he stands, worms are visible all over the body, he pulls them out with the bear hand. He will never stoop down while passing feces, the feces always drop as he moves, the legs are messed up and it stinks from droppings from his feces used. Most parts of the body swell up. With boil and lots swollen bites from body pest that are bigger than my fist. Pus is visible on some of the boils which he occasionally cleans with his hand at times he cleans the pus with his saliva. It is a taboo for *ẹ̀gbìn* to take a bath. Seeds in his eyes are as thick as vomit from someone who eats ẹ̀ko (pulp); it has very stinking odour that can be likened to a rotten meat, maggots are visible in the vomit. His neck is toad like with layers of dirt piled up for a long time which darkens it; it is as dark as black soap. All sorts of reptiles such as earth warm, snakes and scorpions are seen dropping from his mouth as he speaks, he, habitually feeds on these creatures. His nose is always producing mucus, because he uses them as water for cooking food and as drinking water.

The above description gives an irritating portrait of the creature *ẹ̀gbìn* “dirty habit”. *ẹ̀gbìn* as a creature in the text is a personified unaccepted, unclean, unhealthy as well as unwanted attitude by individual in the society that can be hazardous to the well being of the society. An offensive odour signals the approach of the creature. In essence an individual’s dirty act pollutes the air, environment and is capable of spreading virus or contagious ailment. The language here shows that dirty habit or uncleanness is not encouraged in the society because it breeds all sorts of ailment, insects and body pests; harmful creatures such as reptiles inhabits unclean environment, People living in such environment are exposed to pest eating up their body and dangerous reptiles attacking them. Faguwa emphasized the need to develop a good toilet habit such as having a designated place for passing body waste which must not be at man’s arms length; it is unacceptable in the society to pass out body waste on motion thereby soiling the lower limb of the body; an act that can make both the actor and the people around contact diseases. An individual is expected to be in the correct posture “stoop down” when cleaning the bowel, cleaning up ones anus after passing out the waste at a designated area, make sure that the other people living nearby are not directly or indirectly exposed to the waste, washing the hands and other necessary precautions to make a healthy life a reality. In a typical African traditional society, there are taboos that forbid passing body waste at points that will make it assessable to other members of the community. Such taboo are said to be in place to prevent evil minded people from

having opportunity to afflict the whoever owns the body waste by putting charm on it. It is believed that contact with careless dumping of body waste may result in bleeding through the anus by the offender. We presume however that the taboo is to protect the environment from pollution and also promote public health. This need for a clean and neat environment in Yoruba cosmology is retreated in the picture described in Fágúnwà's vivid illustration of the behavior of his personified dirty habit and things associated to environmental pollution in a given environment in the character named *ègbìn* 'dirty habit' in *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ* "Forest of Ten thousand Demons". He concluded the section by stating that the adventurer, *Àkàrà-Oògun*, and his friends appealed to the personified character, *ègbìn* 'unhygienic' to leave the vicinity. In most cities today people are encouraged to build modern restroom. Public restrooms are built in public places to promote public health and environmental sanitation. But in rural settlements where sanitary officers are rare, the people still visit the nearby bush to pass-out body waste. Some use container in night but secretly empty the contentment into the drainage or an undeveloped plot in the environment. The people involved in such practices unfortunately are the ill educated ones in the community. While the local and illiterate individual holds fast to the custom and tradition as taught in the local language, thereby keeping the taboos for the good of all the assumed educated feels the local languages are vernaculars that must not be spoken at all therefore, engages in unhealthy practices. The taboos gradually faded away because everybody wants to live a modern life by speaking foreign language and practice foreign culture not minding the effect wrong education in such practices may have on the immediate environment and public in general. The half educated villagers hold the new, wrong, things learnt in high esteem because they claim to know everything; they usually engage the ignorant ones in discussions, and ill educated them as *ègbìn* engaged his listeners in discussing in text, *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ* "Forest of Ten Thousand Demons", by so doing polluting the environment and endangering the community health.

In the traditional setting, at some distance from each settlement, is a designated place for dumping refuse. Dogs were available to consume children body waste.

2.1. Yoruba teaches clean habits in Poetic form

Furthermore in Yoruba society children are taught the culture of cleanness in poems composed to discourage unhealthy attitude and behaviors in the society. Children poems that encourage cleanness and discourage uncleanness are taught in early stage of childhood education in the society. One of such poems goes thus:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 | Imọ tótó borí àrùn mọlẹ | clean habits is an antidote to ailment |
| | bí oyẹ ẹ borí oorú | as harmattan is antidote to heat |
| | àrùn iwòsì tinú ẹgbìn là wá | uncleanness leads to contacting preventable ailments |
| | | and children lyrics such as |
| | imọ tótó ló le ẹgun àrùn gbogbo | cleanness is an antidote to all ailment |
| | imọ tótó ilé, imọ tótó ara, ati imọ tótó ońje, | clean the residence, body and food |
| | imọ tótó ló le ẹgun àrùn gbogbo | cleanness is an antidote to all ailment |

The poem in data 2 teaches members of the community, especially children, to imbibe the culture of cleanness to avoid sickness. Elders in the society always scold parents especially the mother of any child exhibiting dirty habits. Children that dirty habits exhibit and their parent are seen as social misfits. Only orphan and children of lunatics are expected to be shabbily dressed. Wives of men that are shabbily dressed are queried by the society. The statement is *ẹ o ò nýàwó sílé ni* "are you not married"? The implication is that the wife is expected to assist him in washing his cloths and making sure he is well dressed before living the house. No woman is expected to be dirty. This is portrayed in I. K Dairo's performance.

In early 60s Chief Isaac Idowu Dairo aka IK Dairo produced a record title

È Má Mà Mọbùn Ọaya.

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3. | È má mà mọbùn ọaya | Do not marry a dirty woman |
| | mo ti bOlówa ẹlérí | I made a covenant with God |
| | owo, omọ àtáláfía | money, children and good health |

kÒlúwà fún mí	God should grant to me
èdá tó torí ọmọ móbùn ọyá	A man who marries a dirty woman to raise children
kí lẹ̀bùn máa bí bí kò ọ̀ ẹ̀ ọ̀bùn	should expect to have dirty children from her
ọmọge adódò má wẹ	a girl who will never take her birth at the river side
wundia, to n kun atikè laiwẹ	a maiden putting on powdering unwashed face

Dairo in this song verbalizes the essence of an African man and his life's pursuit. Every African man always prays for wealth (money) procreation and good health. A wealthy African desires to have children who will inherit the wealth and good health to enjoy the wealth. A dirty woman in the home will cause ailment to every member of the family. Since health is wealth, it is wise to live a healthy life. The arts opine that facial appearance may be deceitful. A beautifully dressed girl may be covering the dirty body with clean dress; it is possible for girls to cover the body odor with perfume. In modern days most Africans ladies that have been to cities and foreign countries no longer engage themselves in house cleaning because to them, house helps should do all the house work. Their children are exempted from cleaning the house and taking care of the environment. Restrooms are not properly kept. There are some very gorgeously dressed with flashy cars living in an unkempt room because of the importation of the foreign culture of employing a house keeper. Anytime the employee is absent or ill the house will be in a mess. In a traditional Yoruba society a woman is expected daily to sweep the rooms, kitchen, bathroom the environment, wash plates, children and husbands cloths, clean up the children, prepare clean and good food for the family. A woman who fails in these duties is deemed a failure. Women who value social outing more than the cleanness and healthy life of the family are referred to as *ọ̀bùn*. The word *ọ̀bùn* has a meaning that every Yoruba child wants to dissociate from. A child who really understands Yoruba will not want anybody to call him or her *ọ̀bùn* 'a dirty person', because culturally *ọ̀bùn* is a rejected habit and anybody associated with *ọ̀bùn* is by implication rejected. The evoked practice of using the English word dirty girl by parents or elders to scold a person does not drive home the meaning of the word *ọ̀bùn* which informs such people laughing over such rebuke. If the indigenous word that is culturally meaningful is used such people will make conscious effort to correct the unacceptable habit that is injurious to public health.

4. PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY IN ÀBÈSÀBÈSÌ

In section 2 of this paper we illuminate on the Yoruba public health policy as it affects the people and environment. In this section we will discuss similar phenomenon in Èkiròmì an Àbèsàbèsì speaking community.

4.1. Àbèsàbèsì Sociolinguistic Factors

Àbèsàbèsì (Akpes) spoken is The inhabitants identify themselves and their language as Àbèsàbèsì. Other Àbèsàbèsì comprises of four lects: Èkiròmì spoken in Èkìdòròmì (Ìkàràrà) and Ase; Ìluẹ̀nì Spoken in Ìyàni, Ìbàràrà and Gèdègèdè; Akpes spoken in Àkùnnù, and Ìlúdòtun in Àjowá and Ọ̀sùgù spoken in Dája and Èşùkù in Àjowa. Àbèsàbèsì neighbours are Ahàn speakers in Àjowá, Ìboropa to the South East, Ikakumo to the North east, Erúşú to the South, and Ọ̀kè -Àgbè to the West . As heterogeneous communities, the people acquire Àbèsàbèsì and Yorùbá side by side from childhood. Àbèsàbèsì is the medium of communication within the family , with neighbours and in informal settings such as local or traditional market . Yorùbá is used for church and mosque services and for informal discussions in schools; Àbèsàbèsì is also occasionally used. English is the language of instruction in schools. In some public gatherings; for instance, during celebrations, Yorùbá, English and Àbèsàbèsì are used interchangeably. Most people rate Yorùbá higher than Àbèsàbèsì, they feel there is nothing special for them to learn in Àbèsàbèsì (Agoyi T. O, 2008).

4.1.2. Àbèsàbèsì Language and Health Matters

Àbèsàbèsì people discourage uncleanness and unhealthy living. The phenomenon is portrayed in the language and culture. Proverbs and taboos are formed to discourage dirty habit.

Proverb such as:

4. Ogu mo èyi tşeni yí àmó èyi e je ebidi n dógi onu yí

'the vulture appreciates the fact that it is ugly but detests rotten food'.

. Neè é je ijei ekuku ini ęga.

‘I will not use unwashed mortal to prepare my yams’.

The two statements in 4 are pointers to the fact that Àbèsàbèsì value good and healthy food. To avoid food contamination, the best food must be chosen and all used mortal and piston must be properly washed

Children are always instructed to wash plates immediately after eating. The reason given is that ancestral spirits will need the plates for serving their portion of the food anytime they come on a visit.

Náni itogi ọ wẹn miṣì, mi ojúmi so bè ye itogi bè jining igbosu

Always wash your plates before going to bed because your inner man may need it

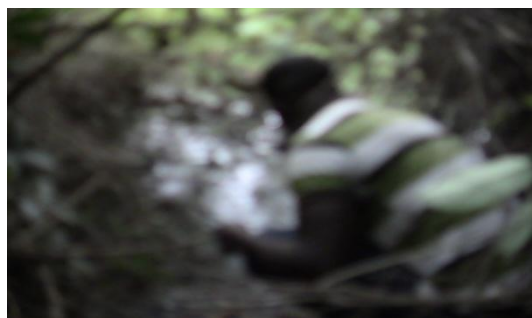
The reason for the instruction is mainly on health ground, but to attract much value religious reasons are attached. It is worthy to note that the rural people live in a natural environment, bush and farm land are not far from the residence. Since the people eat much palm oil as anti acid, unwashed plates and un-kempt leftover food will attract dangerous ants, snakes, rats and other dangerous animals that may be interested in eating up the leftover food and crumbs by night. Such unwanted visitors will create sleepless night and health hazard.

There is special water pot for keeping clean water meant for drinking ‘ajinyi’. “Àjinyi” has to be well covered with a flat cover called ‘òwẹẹ’, on the flat cover, a cup is placed with a clean calabash bowl to cover it. The cup is to fetch water from the pot into another container for whoever wishes to drink. Water in the special pot ‘àjinyi-ngo’ is changed daily after carefully washing the pot and all other accessories. The cultural practice of cleanness pervades all aspects of the life of the Àbèsàbèsì. A pound known as ‘ẹ̀bùgẹ’ is situated on a farm land was one of the specially kept water sources in Àbèsàbèsì communities. The founders dug soil from the spot for building purpose². They established a culture in which the first person to fetch water from the pound has to wash a special hollowed rock with water in found in it. The person after washing his or her container with the water has to fetch fresh water to rings and replace the old one. After completing the ritual, he/she now fetches water for his/her own use. Taboos are attached to the culture is still practiced today. Members of the community fair the consequences of breaking the taboos.

Oral tradition told in chants has it that the spirit in the pound always take offence if the ritual is not performed using the language.



The stone with a hollow at the entrance of ẹ̀bùgẹ³



ẹ̀bùgẹ entrance (our language helper trying to get in to the pond)

² I thank Pa Sanni who is 95 years old and the oldest man in Òṣùgù quarter Ìkàrà̀mù Akoko for offering this information.

³ I thank Blessing Adeooye, the personal secretary to Akala of Ikaramu for assisting me to take the pictures.



The language helper stoops to fetch water from the pond



The sacred pond èbùgè

There is a traditional song rendered by the women to show problem one of them caused on one of their visits to the pound to fetch water. The woman polluted the water from the pound. She moved beyond the stipulated point after speaking a language that is not Àbèsàbèsì. The punishment she was to face was to get drowned (be swallowed up by the goddess of the pound). Elders rally round to appease the goddess to pardon her. A song was composed by women to solicit for assistance of all the elders of the community in pleading for forgiveness on behalf of the culprit by women. It goes thus:

1. Performance :prelude

À n de ò, omisi somi bá o si ba tónIbalógun
si mo hinì áá bá kpàdé ísómisé o
si mǐjọba á ba sé bé yesì ò
mIbalógun sàgì na si mò ta bá tşingí tşè á e
mi n mò màdá bá tşingì tşè á è olówó orín o
ọbanosìsì ótòlòmè
ìdíní lọlọlọ ọdasi àgòrìnyé
ọ mò áá bá lonyi ò
si mò mí dasi bò dú inyi bá ò
mí n inyi mèyì á èè
mí minyi òtòlòmì á è
mọ minyèbùge
mí n ba tşitşenyèlòmì
mí mēheninēheni Íbalógun mò
mí n mibá bá lo nyèbùge o

Hello, there is a message from the king to Balógun
to invite us to a meeting at the king's palace
That the government is paying us a visit
The Balogun invited me to advice him on what to do
I said how do you want us to go about it my lord
The offspring of the goddess of otolomi
who has the power to go beneath water
he informed me that we need water
and instructed me to go and fetch water
I asked for the place he wanted me to fetch the water
I asked if he will want me to fetch the òtòlòmì water
He said he prefers èbùge water
I told all olomi wives
I told them that Balogun said
I said the community needs water from èbùge

mIbalógun mo mi n bo dunyẹ̀bùge bá o	Balogun has sen me on errand to fetch the water
n mò ményiyòkẹ mí bé t̀sìgè no daso	I appealed to them to join me in running the errand.
ìbùrẹ̀ ma ningi ìyẹ̀ m̀oni ekìni bà t̀samùnù o	on getting to ẹ̀bùge some one spoke another
language	
mẹ̀bùge t̀şekù o	ẹ̀bùge felt offended
Song	chorus
Ibalógun t̀sìgè no daso ẹ̀bùge t̀şekù o	Balogun accompany me to plead, ẹ̀bùge is grieved
à n t̀sìgè no ò	please my people accompany me
Ibalógun t̀sìgè no dasò ẹ̀bùge t̀şekù oò	Please Balogun accompany me ẹ̀bùge is grieved
Ibalógun t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	Balogun accompany me please accompany me
òsẹ̀ nódowá t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	my father from odowá accompany me please accompany me
Ológundúú t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	Ológundúú accompany me please accompany me
òsẹ̀ na mò t̀sìgè no daso ẹ̀bùge t̀şekù oò	my father I say accompany me ẹ̀bùge is grieved
nǹ m̀osẹ̀ na mò t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	I say my father accompany me please accompany me
m̀ibùgìyòkẹ̀ t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	I say all Ìyòkẹ̀ wives, accompany me please accompany me
ìibùgèkiròmì à n t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	all Èkiròmì accompany me please accompany me
nǹ màhínkò à n t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	I plead with all accompany me please accompany me
nǹ menyeyòkẹ̀ à n t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	I say, Ìyòkẹ̀ wives accompany me please accompany me
nǹ menyekiròmì à n t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	I say Èkiròmì wives accompany me please accompany me
òsẹ̀ nònekìn t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	my only beloved father accompany please accompany me
Èkìnatò t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò à n t̀sìgè no ò	Èkìnatò people, accompany me please accompany me
Agbáyéró no t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	Agbáyéró accompany me please accompany me
Olóworí no t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	My lord accompany me please accompany me
nǹ m̀ókàyimue t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	I say all goddesses accompany me please accompany me
Dòdòndẹ̀wà t̀sìgè no dasò à n t̀sìgè no ò	Dòdòndẹ̀wà accompany me please accompany me
áyosẹ̀ na t̀sìgè no daso à n t̀sìgè no ò	my paternal grandmother accompany me please accompany me

From the chant and its genesis, it is evident that environmental pollution is a serious offence; and that the local language is highly valued and protected. To seek audience and peace with the goddess of water, the highly placed members have to visit the goddess to plead for mercy on the offender. The implication is that founding fathers of the communities are health conscious, to discourage people from polluting water with all sorts of unhealthy practices, taboos robed in belief and traditions were promoted. Offenders were not protected from the hand of the law. In the performance, the traditional way of passing information to the public and sensitizing the people on the current issues to cooperate in finding solutions is entrenched. Problems are made known to every member of the community, corporate solutions are sort to solve the problem therefore, nobody dear try to break any of the taboos as regards the cleanliness and preservation of the culture in the language without facing the consequence.

Òtòlòòmì is another goddess of water in the community. The cultural practice shows that, priest of òtòlòòmì must sacrifice to the goddess every order day to seek her protection over inhabitants; it is interesting to note that the shrine is always covered with a white cloth with no blood stain. The environment must be kept clean because the goddess hates dirty habit.



Worshippers at òtòlòmì shrine

The priest of òtòlòmì is always dressed in white. The women who participate in the service are always in white dress. Their duty is to cook the meat sacrificed to the goddess for all participants to eat at the shrine.

Òtòlòmì is very selective in her choice of sacrificial animal. Only a female black and very healthy goat or cow can be sacrificed to her. Her priest will be forbidden to talk to her if the sacrifice is defiled. To avoid contamination of food eaten at the shrine the women will cook whatever is met to be eaten immediately.

Implications of the above discussion is that in traditional Nigeria and indeed in Africa societies dirty habit that can lead to health problems is highly discouraged. Nobody wants to associate with *òbùn* ‘a dirty woman’ or have *òbùn* as a wife as portrayed in I. K Dairo’s song above. The language use in this context is important as a normal African will contend abusive words, signs and languages no matter who said it. An African man will protest abusive language him. The culture is imbibed in the children who always protest any elder insulting the parents or senior siblings either male or female.

5. IMPLICATION FOR THE MDGs

In most modern Nigerian communities in particular and African in general, the local languages are highly endangered. Some of them have few very old speakers that are dying gradually thereby indicating the death of such languages; others are fast giving way to Pidgin or French English. The implication is that the lexical items and expressions in local languages which discourage unhealthy habits as well as unacceptable practices are no longer in use; the practice has given rise to youths, children and even adults taking light of what should be taken seriously. Africans by nature have a way of joking with serious issues that are not of direct concern to them and in essence make jest of habits that are injurious to the environment and public health. The successive governments in Nigeria since 1974 refuse to implement the language aspect of the national policy in Education with the excuse of living in a technological age. The situational is worsened by the resent curriculum review which changed the status of Nigerian languages from compulsory to optional subject at the secondary school level. The fact that the MDGs are not well articulated in the local languages using the core words/lexical items to drive home the need to keep the environment clean in a modern way with the traditional picture of the health hazard a polluted environment and dirty habit can produce will encourage UNESCO wasting funds on health care services, through the corrupt government agents and agencies, on the people living in the rural communities which will never get to them. The use of traditional songs to enlighten the public of problems in order to seek corporate solution as epitomized in the Àbèsàbèsì song above, should be encouraged. If songs composed in the local languages are used for public health education it will have greater impact on the rural people than public lectures. The implication is that the African traditional way of life as seen in the indigenous language and its impact on the people will be of vital help in achieving the MDGs health goals with less cost.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the African public health view using Yoruba and Àbèsàbèsì public health policy as case study. We find out that Africans are conscious of their environment and personal; public

health is held in high esteem; it is viewed as very necessary in life “an antidote to wealth. Taboos, chants songs as well as poems are formed to create awareness in a way that will discourage unhealthy practices. We share the view in Forrester (1997:109) that “talk is always dynamic in the sense that as participants we are engaged in an ongoing immediate interactions which, as we have seen, has its own rules, procedures and mechanisms. How we act and what we say are immediately accountable in the sense of both content of the discuss and the way in which it is conducted”⁴ We are convinced that if rural communities engage in public talks and discussions are held in the various languages of the immediate environment as entrenched in their cultural values on health, then the health intervention schemes would have been built on the laid down traditions of the society. The MDGs would have been achieved without much stress and financial cost. It would have had more impact on the rural dwells rather than the urbanized expensive and unattainable economic health care jamborees we read of the pages of news paper. It is worthy of note that only the privileged few in Africa have access to the health intervention UNESCO programmes provide. The health facilities are affordable to the privileged because they have the resources.

REFERENCES

- Adejumo Arinpe (2008) “Conceptualizing the Reality of Millennium Development Goals in Fagúnwà’s Traditional Novels” *Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies*. Vol. 5. No 3:76-95.
- Agoyi T.O. (2008) ‘The Phonology of the Vowel Harmony in Àbèsàbèsì’ Ph. D Thesis Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba- Akoko.
- Dairo I. K MBC and His Blue Spot Band (1960) ‘Eré Ọmọ Mjí F’òwúròmi sá’ Sola Distributors Ogunsola Happy Records Company Lagos, Nigeria
- Fágúnwà D. O. (1950, 2005) *Ògbójú Ọdẹ nínú igbó irúnmolè*; Nelson Publishers Limited Ibadan: Nigeria.
- Frake Charls O. (1980) *Language and Cultural Description* Stanford University Press, Stanford: California
- Forrester Michael A (1997) *Psychology of Language*, Sage Publications: London Goffman E (1976) “Replies and Responses” *Language in Society*, 5:257-311.
- Hanna Patricia and Harrison Bernard (2004) *Practices and Foundations of Language Word and Word* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Mandelbaum D. G (1958 ed) *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*; University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles
- Ọdúnjọ J. F. (First Published 1949, 2014) *Àtúnṣe ti UBE Aláwíyẹ̀ Ìwé Kejì* BHS Book Printing Sdn Bhd Kuala, Malaysia
- Trudgill Peter (1988) *Sociolinguistics An Introduction*, Penguin Books Northumberland Press, Gateshead, Great Britain.
- The Lancet Global health: Public Health Online Publication 25 August 2009; *Achieving the health Millennium Development Goals for South Africa*; challenges and priority www.thelancet.com www.goole.com 3/21/2014
- WHO Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Media centre <http://www.who.int> 3/21/2014 www.thelancet.com www.goole.com 3/21/2014

AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY



Mrs Taiwo Opeyemi AGOYI, PhD, Senior Lecturer, Department of Linguistics and Languages Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko Areas of Interest: Phonology, Comparative and General Linguistics with reference to Language and its meaning in the society Language documentation and maintenance.

⁴ Forrester (1997) cited the quotation from Goffman (1976)