Achieving Millennium Development Goals in Africa through Indigenous Language-Public Health Policy in Africa: A case Study of Àbèsàbèsi¹ 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 Àbèsàbèsi 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, Àbèsàbèsi, 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 polices 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 Àbèsàbèsi 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 health care difficult, the resulting effect is a setback on the policy implementation. African nations adopted the strategy of de-emphasizing financing heath 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 medicaiton. 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 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 Òró tì a bá ni ń ọ tẹẹ̀nu mò bí ọ dún ni, ò ń dún n mò 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/habits using wise saying and proverbs. There are lexical words like ègbìn ’dirty habit’ as portrayed in the works of D. O
Achieving Millennium Development Goals in Africa through Indigenous Language-Public Health Policy in Africa: A Case Study of Àbèṣèbèṣí Speaking Community

Fagunwa. In Ògbôjá ọde Nínú Ègbọ Ìránmọ̀, ‘Forest of Ten Thousand Demons’ Fagunwa’s description of the monster gives irritating picture to readers. It sends message to every reader on the Yoruba societal view of ègbin ‘dirty habit’.

1. orúkọ rẹ a mā jẹ Ègbìn. Kí a tó ri on papa ni a ti bẹrẹsì ìgbòrun rẹ. Òyìn ọrẹ mi, lati ojo ti mo ti de inu aiyé nkò ba iru ohun irira bi ọkunrin yi pade ri: gbogbo ọmọ ika ẹsẹ rẹ, kiki jiga ni, awọn jiga nápo tobẹ ti nwọn ge púpọ nínu awọn ọmọ ika ẹsẹ ná nwọn si tó sì i lati atélẹse de oronkun, opolopo nínu won a mā tikararè yò si lè bi on ba tinrin lọ. Orisirísi òju lo wà ni ẹsẹ rẹ ẹwe ni on si mā nbo won loju nitori eyiti o ba kere jú nínu won lo mọ bi atélẹwọ mì; opolopo nínu awọn ọju nà ni on kò fi nkankan bi nitori ẹwe kekerẹ kò ka won, nwọn a mā ẹsẹ omi pèlu ẹtù bi o ba ti nkọja. Ègbìn kí inu idi bi o ba yagbẹ ẹpà imi ati ọdún ọmọta ni iho idi rẹ; bi o ba duro awọn aráran ati ẹjediji a mā jade ni idi rẹ nwọn a mā ri i ni ara ka on a si mā ẹwọ fa won kuro ni ègbẹ rẹ; bi o ba mā yagbẹ ki iberẹ ki isi iduro ni òju kan, a mā yagbẹ bi o ba ti nírìn ọjọ imi a mā ẹja si i ni ẹsẹ a si mā ẹjẹ si i ni itan. Onírùrù ọwọ ati ileroro ni o yi ọkunrin nà ka ọkọkan won tobi ju ẹsẹ mi lọ, nwọn a mā tu si i lara on a si mā ẹwọ ba omi won a mā fi i si ẹnu. Ègbìn kí iwè: èwọ ni. Īpin ọju rẹ dabi ẹbi ẹnih iti o ṣe ẹkọ, a mā rún bi ẹran ti nńa a si mā ẹsẹ idin jade. Òrun rẹ
dabi ara opolọ èrì aiyẹbáiyé sì lẹ mọ ọ: o dudu bi ọṣẹ. Èkoko, ejo akēkēati onírùrù èda afaïyafa ni imá jade lẹnu rẹ bi o ba nṣoro, on a si mā je won bi onjẹ nigbati ebi ba de si i. Êkun kò lè tan ni imú Ègbìn lailai on ni ifi ise omi wa ounjẹ oun ni isi imú 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 ègbìn 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 ègbìn to take a bath. Seeds in his eyes are as thick as vomit from someone who eats ẹkọ (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 pilled 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 ègbìn “dirty habit”. Ègbìn 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 uncleaness 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 Fágúnwá’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 ẹgbin ‘dirty habit’ in Ògbójú Òde Nínú Ìgbò Òrúnmọlẹ “Forest of Ten thousand Demons”. He concluded the section by stating that the adventurer, Àkàrà-Oògun, and his friends appealed to the personified character, ẹgbin ‘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 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 ẹgbin engaged his listeners in discussing in text, Ògbójú Òde Nínú Ìgbò Òrúnmọlẹ “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 tọtọ bori àrù mọtẹ
bí oye pẹ bori ooru
àrùn iwọsì tinú ẹgbìn là wá
imọ tọtọ lọ le sẹgún àrùn gbogbo 2ice
imọ tọtọ ilé, imọ tọtọ ara, ati imọ tọtọ ońje,
imọ tọtọ lọ le sẹgún àrùn gbogbo

imọ tọtọ bori àrù múfẹ
mọ ti bọ̀lógwa ńṣéérí
owọ, ọmọ átálááfia

clean habits is an antidote to ailment
as harmattan is antidote to heat
uncleanness leads to contacting preventable ailments and children lyrics such as
cleanliness is an antidote to all ailment
clean the residence, body and food
cleanliness 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 sé o dí ìjágí 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

Ẹ Mái Mógbùn Šaya.

3. Ẹ má mà móbùn šaya 2ice  Do not marry a dirty woman
mo ti bọ́lówa ńṣéérí  I made a covenant with God
owọ, ọmọ átálááfia  money, children and good 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 Sociolingviducal Factors

Àbèsàbèsì (Akpès) spoken is The inhabitants identify themselves and their language as Àbèsàbèsì. Other Àbèsàbèsì comprises of four lects: Èkiròmì spoken in Èkiròmì (Ìkáràmù) and Àjọ̀gù; Èkùnì spoken in Ìyani, Èbàràmì and Èdègù; Èkiròmì spoken in Àkùnnù and Ìlùdù. Àbèsàbèsì is a 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 uncleanliness 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 ẹ̀yí tẹsẹ́ ọ́jọ́ ẹ̀yí ẹ̀ jẹ́ ebidi ń dògí onu yí ‘the vulture appreciates the fact that it is ugly but detests rotten food’.
Neè é je ijejí ẹkúkú ini ẹnka.

‘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 miṣi, 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 ‘ajinyí’. ‘Àjínyí’ has to be well covered with a flat cover called ‘ọwẹẹ’, 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 ‘àjínyí-ndo’ 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 ‘èbùge’ 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 purpose. 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.

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

3 I thank Blessing Adeooye, the personal secretary to Akala of Ikaramu for assisting me to take the pictures.
A traditional song rendered by the women to show problem one of them caused on one of their visits to the pond to fetch water. The woman polluted the water from the pond. 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 pond). 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 dẹ ọ, ọmisi somi bá o si ba tónbalógun
si mo hinì àá bá kpàdè ísómísé o
si mijo ba á ba sé bé yesí ó
mibalógun sàgì na si mò ta bá tšingí tšë á e
mi n mò màdá bá tšingí tšë á è olówó orín o
óbanosií òtòlòme
ìdìnì lọlọlọ òdasi àgòrìnyé
ó mò àá bá lonyì ọ
si mò mí dasi bò dú inyí bá ó
mi ń inyí mèyì á èè
mi miniyì òtòlòmì á è
mó minyèbùge
mi n ba tšitsenỳèlìmì
mi mèheninèheni Ilbalógun mò
mi n mìbá bá lo nyèbùge o

Hello, there is a message from the king to Balogun
Hello, there is a message from the king to Balogun
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 otolomi water
He said he prefers ẹbùge water
I told all olomi wives
I told them that Balogun said
I said the community needs water from ẹbùge
mìbalógún mo mi n bo dunyèbùge bá o
n mó ményiṣòpékì mí bẹ́ tšìgè no daso
ibùrẹ̀ ma nìngi iyé móni èkìnì bá tšamúnlú o
language
mèbùge tšèkú o

Song
Ibalógún tšìgè no daso ẹ̀bùge tšèkú o
à n tšìgè no ó
Ibalógún tšìgè no dasò ẹ̀bùge tšèkú o
Ibalógún tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
öṣè nódówá tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
my father from odówá accompany me please accompany me
Olóngundúú tšìgè no dasò à ì tšìgè no ó Olóngundúú accompany me please accompany me
öṣè na mò tšìgè no dasò ẹ̀bùge tšèkú o
ñí móṣé na mò tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
mìbùgìyòkè tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
I say all ìyókè wives, accompany me please accompany me
ìbùgégìkómì à n tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
all Òkìnòmì accompany me please accompany me
ñí máhúńko à n tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
I plead with all accompany me please accompany me
ñí menyeòkè à n tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
I say, ìyókè wives accompany me please accompany me
ñí menyeòkìmòì à n t tšìgè no dasò à n t tšìgè no ó
my only beloved father accompany please accompany me
Èkìnàto tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó à n t tšìgè no ó Èkìnàto people, accompany me please accompany me
Ağbáyerọ̀ no tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó Agháyérọ̀ accompany me please accompany me
Olówórí no tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
My lord accompany me please accompany me
ñí mókàyínìmù tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
I say all goddesses accompany me please accompany me
Dódóndèwà tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó DóDóndèwà accompany me please accompany me
áyọ̀ṣè na tšìgè no dasò à n tšìgè no ó
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 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 dare try to break any of the taboos
as regards the cleanliness and preservation of the culture in the language without facing the
consequence.

Òtòlòmì is another goddess of water in the community. The cultural practice shows that, priest of
òtòlòmì 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.
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 ọ̀bùn ‘a dirty woman’ or have ọ̀bùn as a wife as portrayed in L. 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 implication is that the African traditional way of life as seen in the indigenous language and its impact on the people will be of vita 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


Dairo I. K MBC and His Blue Spot Band (1960) ‘Eré Ọmọ Mji F’òwùròmì só’ Sola Distributors Ogunsola Happy Records Company Lagos, Nigeria


Ọdánjọ J. F. (First Published 1949, 2014) Àtúnṣe ti UBE Aláwíyé Ìwé Kejì BHS Book Printing Sdn Bhd Kuala, Malaysia


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)