

## **EFFECT OF LANGUAGE ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION OF MDGS IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY INTERPRETERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of MDGs is to encourage development by improving social and economic condition in the world's poorest countries. At the heart of the goals is the recognition that for this global initiative to be effective, all people need to be included and language is the key to inclusion. Language is at the centre of human activity, self-expression and identity. Recognizing the primary importance that people place on their own language fosters the kind of true participation in development that achieves lasting results. In Nigeria, majority of the people in rural communities and some urban communities cannot communicate in English language. These are the people that need development the most. They require knowledge of the MDGs to enhance their livelihood. Unfortunately, both the policy and implementation processes of the MDGs are anchored in English language. This study seeks to examine the effect of language on the policy implementation of the MDGs in Nigeria. This study adopts a descriptive approach to investigate the problem and proffer solution. The study therefore recommends that the MDGs should employ community interpreters that will step down the knowledge required by all Nigerians to ensure effective implementation of MDGs policies.

**Keywords:** Language, Policy implementation, MDGs, community interpreting.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language occupies a prominent place in any nation. People in every society have a way of interacting with one another via language. The Federal Government, in recognition of the pivotal role of language, makes provisions for it in the National Policy on Education (NPE). The NPE (FGN, 2004) reflects government's intention of using the Mother Tongue (MT) as a medium of instruction in the early stage of a child's school life, with transition to English as a medium of instruction in the upper primary classes. Gadamer (1975) assert that language is central to human understanding, as it is through speech that one can bridge the distance between differing horizons of understanding. Language and communication are therefore at the centre of human knowledge and understanding. Fairclough (1989).

Recognizing the primary importance that people place on their own language fosters the kind of true participation in development that achieves lasting results. In Nigeria, majority of the people in rural communities and some urban communities cannot communicate in English language. Thus, making them unable to participate in so many programmes which are explained in English without the use of native language.

Policy and implementation are closely related as policy includes intended effects, that is, policy envisages implementation. Hence, a policy is not real until the intended changes have taken place (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1974). Implementation entails a process of interaction between the setting of goals and actions geared to achieving them. Studying the process of implementation, therefore, includes the setting of goals towards which implementation is directed. In implementing the objectives of the MDGs language provisions, appropriate interpretation is an ultimate necessity.

**For the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved a lot of things need to be put in place, this is the shared opinion of concerned people all over the world, since the year 2000 when leaders** of 189 countries gathered at the United Nations headquarters and signed the historic Millennium Declaration, a lot of policies have been proposed and put in place to achieving a set of eight measurable goals that range from halving extreme poverty and hunger to promoting gender equality and reducing child mortality. According to the formal UN Secretary General Ban ki Moon in his preface to transitioning from MDGs to the SDGs noted that The Millennium Development Goals are the international community's most broadly shared, comprehensive and focused framework for reducing poverty. The MDGs represent the commitments of United Nations Member States to reduce extreme poverty and its many manifestations: hunger, disease, gender inequality, lack of education and access to basic infrastructure, and environmental degradation. Machineries have been put in place by various governments to the realization of this time bound targets with substantial progress made so far. The world has already realized the first MDG of halving the extreme poverty rate by 2015. However, the achievements have been uneven. The MDGs target date of 2015 has expired and a post-2015 agenda continues. The focus is now on building a sustainable world where environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and economic development are equally valued. . The approach was guided by the Millennium Declaration and its emphasis on development as a right, with targeted attention directed towards traditionally marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, and women.

Despite aggregate gains worldwide in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) the state of development for the world's ethno linguistic rural communities especially in Nigeria continue to lag behind, putting them at risk for even greater disparities that hinder efforts to

overcome poverty, illiteracy and disease; as well as increasing the likelihood of conflict arising from exclusion. UNESCO has long insisted that languages play an essential role in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) "Language is the key to inclusion. Language is at the center of human activity, self-expression and identity. Recognizing the primary importance that people place on their own language fosters the kind of true participation in development that achieves lasting results." (UNESCO Bangkok 2012) ignoring someone's language is tantamount to not only ignoring one's presence, but also denying their very existence, language is indispensable for development and unity, that is arguably the reason why it is increasingly being recognized in Nigeria that progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is not happening equitably because many of the low-income communities in which more progress is needed live in complex language situations and since Nigeria's engagement with the MDGs has been guided by external funding sources, the language used by government in national development plans has been highly influenced by the language of the MDGs. This paper asserts the fact that choosing the best language in which to engage with these marginalized communities is key to achieving the MDGs and has proposed an immediate solution to solving the conundrum with the employment/engagement of community interpreters to bridge the language gap.

### **MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)**

In September 2000, leaders of 189 countries gathered at the United Nations headquarters and signed the historic Millennium Declaration, The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were an expression of solidarity with the world's poorest and most vulnerable. They translated noble principles and great aspirations into a set of time-bound, shared targets. The Goals mobilized the world to tackle poverty's many dimensions, forming a framework for a global partnership that ushered in a new era of development cooperation.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were the eight international development goals for the year 2015 that had been established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. All 191 United Nations member states at that time, and at least 22 international organizations, committed to help achieve the following Millennium Development Goals by 2015:

<b>The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)</b>	
Goal 1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
Goal 2	Achieve universal primary education
Goal 3	Promote gender equality and empower women
Goal 4	Reduce child mortality
Goal 5	Improve maternal health
Goal 6	Combating HIV/AIDs, malaria, and other diseases
Goal 7	Ensure environmental sustainability
Goal 8	Develop a global partnership for development

**The MDGs target date of 2015 has expired and a post-2015 agenda continues**

According to World Bank Group(2015) The Rio+20 conference (the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development) in Rio de Janeiro, June 2012, galvanized a process to develop a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will carry on the momentum generated by the MDGs and fit into a global development framework beyond 2015.

In the interest of creating a new, people-centered, development agenda, a global consultation was conducted. Civil society organizations, citizens, scientists, academics, and the private sector from around the world were all actively engaged in the process. Activities included thematic and national consultations, and the My World survey led by the United Nations Development Group. Specialized panels were also held and provided ground to facilitate intergovernmental discussions. The UN Secretary General presented a synthesis of the results of these consultation processes.

In July 2014, the UN General Assembly Open Working Group (OWG) proposed a document containing 17 goals to be put forward for the General Assembly's approval in September 2015. This document set the ground for the new SDGs and the global development agenda spanning from 2015-2030.

<b>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as proposed by the OWG</b>	
<u>Goal 1</u>	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
<u>Goal 2</u>	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
<u>Goal 3</u>	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
<u>Goal 4</u>	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
<u>Goal 5</u>	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
<u>Goal 6</u>	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
<u>Goal 7</u>	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
<u>Goal 8</u>	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
<u>Goal 9</u>	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation
<u>Goal 10</u>	Reduce inequality within and among countries
<u>Goal 11</u>	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
<u>Goal 12</u>	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
<u>Goal 13</u>	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
<u>Goal 14</u>	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development
<u>Goal 15</u>	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss
<u>Goal 16</u>	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
<u>Goal 17</u>	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

## **OVERVIEW OF COUNTRY PROGRESS ON MDGS FOR NIGERIA**

According to the latest UNDP MDG progress report for Nigeria published in 2013; the country is on track to achieve universal primary education and gender parity in enrolment but is unlikely to meet the remaining targets. There is contested evidence on whether the country will achieve the target for HIV/AIDS, but a majority of the sources show that it has made good progress on reducing the incidence in the country over the last two decades (UN MDG Country Progress Report 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010 and 2013).

### **Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

In 2013, 62.6% of the total population was poor according to the \$1.25 a day measure, which made the country's aim of reaching the 21.4% goal by 2015 unlikely.

### **Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

Nigeria is on track to meet the 2015 targets, although there is some dispute over the data. The country has achieved at least 80% in all the three indicators – net enrolment rate, gross enrolment rate and primary completion rate.

### **Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**

The 90% ratio of girls to boys in primary enrolment indicates that the country is on track to achieving gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment by 2015.

### **Goal 4: Reduce child mortality**

At 61 deaths per 1000 live births, infant mortality lags behind the 2015 target of 30.3 per 1,000 live births. Similarly, at 94 deaths per 1000 live births in 2012, the under-five mortality rate lags behind the 2015 target of 63.7 per 1,000 live births.

### **Goal 5: Improve maternal health**

The maternal mortality rate in 2013 was 350 per 100,000 live births against the target of 250 per 100,000 live births for 2015.

### **Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

Different scorecards have provided an inconsistent picture of Nigeria's progress. The CGD Dev scorecard registers little progress on the HIV/AIDS target, while the TAC Economics MDG Tracker and the ODI MDG scorecard shows the HIV/AIDS target to be one of the few that Nigeria is on track to meet in the next few years. The UN MDG report records that the national

rate of HIV/AIDS incidence has stabilised at 4.1%, but wide disparities exist across gender and states within the country.

### **Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability**

Nigeria is off-track for the 2015 targets on access to clean water, improved sanitation and reduction of deforestation.

### **Goal 8: Global partnership for development**

Official development assistance (ODA) per capita to the country has doubled since the early 2000s. In 2011, ODA per capita was \$9.20 compared to \$8.70 in 2008 and \$4.89 in 2005. 80% of the aid is directed towards human capital and social development while 10% goes towards governance and general administration.

## **CHALLENGES OF MDGS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES IN NIGERIA**

It is essential to gain an understanding of the challenges which need to be addressed to achieve development and attain the MDGs. This is informed by the characteristics of the rural areas and the significance of the rural dwellers in national development.

A survey in Nigeria shows that most deaths and failure of most programme policies are no long due to these reasons; for these according to Yusuf (2006) are:

1. Lack of adequate funding for public education and inequitable allocation of resources between rural and urban areas;
2. Inadequate health facilities;
3. Lack of sufficient care and appropriate laws to protect the environment.
4. Gender power relations between men and women, especially as regards domestic decision-making;
5. Low educational status of men and women; etc.

It is very important that the above statistics show clearly things mounting challenges which Nigeria needs to overcome to reach the MDGs and ensure improved welfare for her people, especially the rural dwellers. The rural dwellers lack education and in most areas, the people in such areas use their Mother Tongue (MT) to communicate or interact with each other.

MDGs as programme aims are mostly found or exist in the rural communities. But due to the challenges of the language of the programme, most rural dweller feel not to participate in such programmes since they are literate enough to read and understand the policies of the MDGs. This

poses a bigger challenge to MDGs in implementing their programmes/policies especially in the rural communities.

It is generally believed that a rural community is any geographic area that is located outside cities and towns. But this is not an adequate definition. Researchers have listed diverse features that inform on the rurality of a community in general and in Africa in particular (Unagha and Ibenne, 2011). A recent study by Uzuegbu (2014) has harmonized and summarized the diverse features – traversing economic, social, political, religious and secular components – and concludes that a community is regarded as rural when it possess the followings features:

1. Its population is relatively small, with a higher number of children, older people and youth respectively;
2. It has a common ethno-linguistic feature such as race, tribe, language, etc.;
3. Its members loyally answer to one leader;
4. Its members are predominantly farmers who largely depend on farming for their livelihood rather than on non-farming occupations;
5. The inheritance system of ownership determines who acquires what among the dwellers;
6. Its members usually adhere to one religion, belief and practice;
7. Its members live a communal style of life and approach their general affairs collectively rather than individually;
8. Its members depend directly or indirectly on the natural resources (land and forest, stream, market, road, etc.) in their area for their livelihood;
9. Its members usually share institutional structures such as market, bank, school, health centre, etc.;
10. Its members do not see the various components of life (economic, social, political, religious and secular) as distinct from each other. Rather, to them, each component affects the other and reaching them on one of the components means approaching them on all of them. (Uzuegbu, 2014: 256)

It has been clearly observed that rural dwellers need to be provided with relevant programmes in order to improve their ways of life and living. This policies/programmes information has to be in their local language for several reasons, lack of formal education, cultures, and right decision-making. In order to achieved this effectively, community interpreters must be involved.

### **COMMUNITY INTERPRETERS**

Many controversies concerning the role of community interpreters arise from the fact that there are debates over the definition of the concept of community interpreters.



Moreover, a great deal of ambiguity stems from varying levels of development and recognition of community interpreters. Hence, countries and researchers in terms of their attitudes towards the concept “range from those that deny existence of the issue (an ever diminishing number), through countries that rely on ad hoc services, to generic language services, to fully comprehensive responses of service provision and accreditation” (Buendia 2010).

In general, there are many definitions of the concept, but all of them are united by the fact that community interpreters “enhance equal access to public and community services for individuals who do not speak the language of service” (Bancroft et al. 2013). As a rule, communicative interpreting is consecutive, but there are instances when it is simultaneous though the latter cases are rare (Pekanheimo, Kauhala, & Ojala 2013). The definition given in the Canadian National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services seems to be the most objective and all-encompassing:

Bidirectional interpreting that takes place in the course of communication among speakers of different languages. The context is the provision of public services such as healthcare or community services and in settings such as governmental agencies, community centers, legal settings, educational institutions, and social services. (Healthcare Interpretation Network 2007)

However, such ambiguity of terms creates additional complications for comprehension and identification of the role that the community interpreters play. Some of such terms include dialogue interpreting, liaison interpreting, court interpreting, medical interpreting, business interpreting, ad hoc interpreting, media interpreting, telephone interpreting, TV interpreting, and sign interpreting (Jiang 2007). The above listed notions are employed when there is a clear intention to emphasize some peculiar aspect of the interpretation process. For instance, dialogue interpreting implies that there is a dialogue between the participants, but fails to focus on the setting (Jiang 2007). Liaison interpreting emphasizes “the link or contact between different groups of speakers who do not speak the same language” and is often interchanged with such terms as escort or delegate interpreting (Jiang 2007).

Moreover, the definition of roles of community interpreters becomes even more complicated if to take into account that some kinds of interpretation may overlap, for instance, legal interpreting and community interpreting, in addition to complications caused by development and publication of quite different and even sometimes contrary codes of ethics for community interpreters. The following section of the paper is aimed at summarizing and analyzing the most wide-spread roles of community interpreters as defined by interpreters themselves, professional unions, and researchers.

## **Role of Community Interpreters**

The role of an interpreter in interpreting continues to be a subject of debates. There are various views on this issue and these views vary depending on situational context, parties involved, and the country where the interpretation takes place. Thus, there are proponents of an idea that community interpreters should perform the role of “translating machines”, i.e. delivering verbatim interpretation of everything said by all parties involved without taking into account the cultural and other differences (Leanza, 2005). Such a view is the most prevailing in the context of court interpreting when judges may demand an almost word-for-word translation. However, such approach remains highly debated and doubted among professional interpreters and researchers who point out the impossibility and invalidity of such interpreting performance due to the lack of consistency and inability to convey the original intended message in the language of translation in such case. Thus, the overwhelming majority of contemporary professional interpreters and researchers in this field tend to suggest that interpreting “can facilitate intercultural communication, construct bridges between different symbolic universes and facilitate the process of migrant integration” (Leanza, 2005). Various researchers have been engaged in determining the role of community interpreters over the years and some of their findings are presented below with a special focus on their universal applicability to interpreting in general.

European and American code of ethics for community interpreters seem to be quite different in terms of their emphasis on the interpreter’s role. The Finnish code of ethics for community interpreters complies with other European codes of this kind developed and published by professional unions. Thus, according to it, one of the main requirements for interpreters is to be “impartial, remain outsiders to the situation, and do not let their personal attitudes or opinions affect their work” (Pekanheimo, Kauhala, and Ojala 2013). They are to take into account “the nature of the situation”, but should not care for any other tasks but interpretation itself (Pekanheimo, Kauhala, & Ojala 2013). Besides, they “do not leave out anything or add anything irrelevant” (Pekanheimo, Kauhala, & Ojala 2013). The code does not mention anything relating to cultural mediation and intends to ensure that interpreters remain a quite detached third party in any instance.

In turn, the Canadian National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services emphasizes the significance of the interpreter possessing highly developed linguistic and interpretation competence, but it also provides the following role that community interpreters should adhere to: “The interpreter must be able to understand and convey cultural nuances without assuming the role of advocate or cultural broker” (Healthcare Interpretation Network 2007). There are virtually no other mentioning of cultural mediation role of interpreters, yet the guide encourages

them to do anything they deem reasonable to ensure effective communication of the parties, which implies that interpreters are not prohibited from taking a more active role than an impartial verbatim translating machine. However, this point of cultural mediation and assumption of the role of advocates by some community interpreters is rather controversial as well.

### **Community Interpreters and Policy Implementation**

Community interpreters as defined Bancroft *et al.* (2013) “enhances equal access to public and community services for individuals who do not speak the language of service.”

The role of interpreters who prefer to be actively involved in rendition of social services and go beyond their interpreting functions as in a value-conflict situation, the community interpreters choose to interpret to the people the policies and programmes of the institution (Leanza 2005). In the matter is real-life situation, interpreters primary function is to ensure effective and productive communication despite any cultural differences that the parties may have, hence necessitating them to perform a role of a mediator to a varying extent.

Leanza (2005) assert that community interpreters perform their role of mediators in many policies/programmes which aid such organizations to implement their programmes/policies effectively. For instance Fadama III Programmes which aid many famers in Nigeria by funding them financially and by providing seeds of crops to the farmer to cultivate. WHO also use this group of persons in implementing their health programmes/policies such as “Eradication of Malaria” in rural community which has made it effectively.

Another study by Leanza defines four primary roles of community interpreters, including those of a system agent, community agent, integration agent, and linguistic agent with the latter being deemed least effective in most settings (Jacobsen 2009).

The practice also proves that interpreters assume more active roles than official norms and guidelines prescribe. Thus, this helps in implementing policies by carrying along the rural dwellers who are illiterate and making them to participate actively in the programmes.

Most essential community interpreters possess cultural competence in both original language and the language of interpretation in order to be able to bridge the gap between the parties.

Many governmental agencies, especially the ones dealing with asylum decisions, such as MDGs are reluctant to communicate openly with the mass and this makes them find difficult to carry everybody along in their programmes/policies especially the rural dwellers.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has provided an overview of the effect of language on policy implementation on MDGs taking into consideration the role of community interpreters as been essential in achieving policy implementation in the rural areas. This is due to lack of formal education of the rural people which makes them unable to read and understand the policies of the MDGs since they are written only in the formal language (English). On the contrary, this rural dwellers feel not been carried along and then decide not to partake in such programmes even though essential to them.

In order to make these programmes/policies effective in Nigeria, the MDGs should take into consideration the following:

They should employ community interpreters whose work is to “enhance equal access to public and community services for individuals who do not speak the language of service” (Bancroft *et al.* 2013). They should be able to adequately assess and respond to the needs of the rural people through community interpreters with a view of ensuring effective communication.

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