

Editorial

This Special Issue on *African Indigenous Languages and Communication for Sustainable Livelihood* starts from the premise that language is not only a means of communication but also a necessary condition for survival of humankind. Every historical epoch of human society, has depended on some form of communication network. As communication is the essence of using language so it will be virtually impossible for any group of human community to define successfully their common and binding interest without language. Language is vital to human thinking itself because it enables people to express, share and bring to reality innovative ideas and social practices for improved life. Since people live in communities, every human society is organized into speech communities. This implies that to live in many communities requires familiarity with more than one language. It is on the basis of this consideration that sociolinguists believe that 'speaking' is a social act as the variation in speech habits can be seen as related to some social phenomena. There is also a growing realization on the importance of language in communicating information either in the academic, political, scientific or business world. Language issues are increasingly intruding upon scientific and technological problems so much so that contemporary engineers and scientists cannot afford to ignore its benefits to mankind.

However, this Special Issue emphasises that in this 21st Century, the world's linguistic and cultural diversity is endangered by the cultural, economic and political forces of globalization. These include transnational corporations and international trade; international communication and technology, which work to standardise and homogenise, even as they stratify and marginalise people and cultures. The process of alienating people, especially in the developing world including Africa, from communicating in their own indigenous languages, has made globalization to become an agent of cultural destruction. The pressures of globalization threaten linguistic, cultural, and educational rights of indigenous communities. One of the common views of this Special Issue is that when even one language falls silent, the world loses a complete repository of human knowledge because every language is a living museum, a monument to every culture it has been a vehicle to. It is a loss

to all humankind if a fraction of that diversity disappears when there is something that could have been done to prevent it.

In order for information and knowledge to be useful, it must be effectively communicated. This is important if people are going to respond successfully to opportunities and challenges of social, economic and technological changes, including those that help to improve agricultural productivity, food security and rural livelihoods. Indigenous languages as community-based languages are the tools of communication for sustainable livelihood and development. They are the carriers of cultures and people's social values and practices in food security, environmental management, health and traditional medicine, conflict management, governance and leadership. They may express gendered values and behaviour, differentiating between masculine and feminine spheres of expression and being. Indigenous language may also be used to cover up uncertainty and as a means for exercising power relations.

Development goals can only be achieved if knowledge and information are shared effectively, if rural stakeholders in their own local languages are actively involved in decision making process. Communication systems for sustainable development can support field programmes by linking up research, training, extension and education efforts, but they have to reflect different cultural contexts and audience characteristics. A great part of the approximately 7 000 languages spoken today are indigenous and each of these contain knowledge that is lost when they are extinguished. Just as biological diversity is essential to livelihoods, linguistic diversity is essential to human existence. Loss of indigenous languages can have a dramatic effect on population groups' ability to maintain indigenous knowledge and food systems. Any neglect, or outright suppression, of indigenous languages and the values they carry may have disastrous effects not only on the accumulated know-how of humankind, but also on the self-esteem of speakers of such languages.

This Special Issues on African Indigenous Languages and Communication for Sustainable Livelihood presents diverse contributions on the issues raised above: Nadaraj Govender discusses the issue of locating the centrality of African

languages and African indigenous knowledge in the *Embodiment* Thesis - Implications for education; Felix and Dennis Banda present Nyanja/Chewa proverbs as didactics: Recontextualising indigenous knowledge for academic writing; Juliet Kamwendo and Hassan O Kaya examine gender and African proverbs. They argue that some African proverbs are used to articulate the deeply entrenched patriarchal systems of African social and cultural organization; Zinhle Nkosi uses the case of one Durban secondary school to investigate what content can be taught using Zulu proverbs and how?; Vuyokazi Nomlomo and Zilungile Sosibo examine indigenous knowledge systems and early literacy development: An analysis of IsiXhosa and IsiZulu tra-

ditional children's folktales and songs, Hassan Kaya, Gregory Kamwendo and Leonce Rushubirwa discuss the role African indigenous languages in higher education in South Africa; Jabu Mzimela explores the role of teaching using folklore in developing Grade R learners' mother tongue; Bonakele Mhlongo looks at beyond the policy rhetoric: IsiZulu in a dual-medium post-graduate language teacher programme; A Makoae makes an analysis of conceptual metaphor in the Sesotho Catholic church hymnbook, Lifela Tsa Bakriste: Denoting the metaphors of connotative names; and C. Anyanwu assesses students' perceptions of conversational IsiZulu as a compulsory module in a South African university.

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Hassan O. Kaya
University of KwaZulu-Natal
South Africa