1. Introduction: Languages and the Sustainable Development Goals after Covid-19

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The 12th Language and Development Conference (LDC) took place in Dakar, Senegal, from 27 to 29 November 2017 on the theme of Language and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It was the first time an LDC was conducted in French and English and only the second time it was conducted bi- or trilingually.[1] Over 270 papers were submitted from 60 countries, resulting in 100 presentations at the conference. Twenty-one of these papers have been selected for this book.

What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

The SDGs, adopted by all United Nations (UN) member states in 2015, represent the world's universal framework for sustainable development:

> *The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. The seventeen Goals are all interconnected, and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve them all by 2030.*

United Nations (2020)

The 17 SDGs are:

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reducing inequality
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals.

United Nations (2015)

Why was this theme chosen?

In 2015, the UN adopted the new SDGs for 2015–30, building on the achievements of their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Two years on, this conference provided an opportunity to explore the role of language in achieving these new goals.

The focus on language and the SDGs is a logical progression for the LDC series. The UN's development agenda has been the focus of an LDC before: the 10th LDC in 2013 had already focused on the MDGs (see McIlwraith, 2014). Indeed, the LDCs can be considered to represent a useful barometer of emerging themes in attitudes and policy related to language and development. For an overview of the changing relationships between language planning and development since 1945, and the LDCs' reflection of this over time, Hywel Coleman's article 'Milestones in language planning and development aid' (2017) is highly recommended reading.

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1. The 6th LDC in Tashkent was conducted in English, Russian and Uzbek.

Why is it important?

Paulin G Djité reminds us in this book that 'there is no development without communication'. Yet languages are invisible in the SDGs.

The 17 SDGs are broken down into 169 targets. Progress towards these targets is tracked by country-by-country monitoring of 231 unique indicators (UNSD, 2020). However, language is not mentioned in any of them.

When the SDGs were announced, there was widespread disappointment – even 'dismay' as the Study Group on Language and the United Nations called it (Marinotti, 2016: p. 2) – that there was no mention of language. Efforts have since been made among experts in the field of language and development to include an element of language monitoring under SDG 4. One sub-indicator has been adopted which does focus on language, although it remains optional: 4.5.2 Percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction (see Benson, this volume).

A brief look at some of the issues that were considered at the UN as they prepared to operationalise this sub-indicator – such as the 'monolingual perspective' of most data sources 'falling short of class room realities' (UIS, 2018: p. 11) – is enough to detect some of the recurring themes in this book, for example the difficulty of finding a universal definition applicable to diverse circumstances around the world; and the predominance of 'Northern' assumptions in these universal definitions and the collection of data.

Despite issues such as these, the development of sub-indicator 4.5.2 is an achievement which shows that the argument for language and development is being won, to some extent, in the field of education (SDG 4). Indeed, mother tongue-based education has been advocated by UNESCO since 1951 (UNESCO, 1953) and is increasingly being implemented worldwide, at least in early primary grades.

Language remains invisible in all the other SDGs. But even if language is not mentioned explicitly, UNESCO and others have identified where language and multilingualism have a role to play in all the SDGs (e.g. Asia Multilingual Education Working Group, 2017 or UNESCO, 2012 on the MDGs).

This conference chose, as its sub-themes, to look at the language dimension of three SDGs in particular:

- multilingualism for quality, equitable and inclusive education (corresponding to SDG 4: Quality education)
- language, skills and sustainable economic growth (corresponding to SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth)
- communication, peace and justice (corresponding to SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions).

These sub-themes provide the structure of this book.

The impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 has reversed progress on the SDGs. At the launch of their foundation's *Goalkeepers Report* tracking 18 key SDG indicators in September 2020, Bill and Melinda Gates remarked 'we've been set back 25 years in about 25 weeks' (Gates Foundation, 2020). Bill Gates also stated that 'the importance of the goals if anything is reinforced by the pandemic' (Wulfhorst, 2020) and the *Goalkeepers Report* concludes that 'what the world does in the next few months matters a great deal' (Gates Foundation, 2020).

Looking at the three SDGs at the core of this book, the effects of the pandemic will be profound. The World Bank (2020) forecasts 'the deepest global recession since World War II'. This will lead to an increase in political instability around the world and an undermining of institutions (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020). In education, school and university closures have affected nearly 1.6 billion learners in 195 countries: 94 per cent of the world's student population, and 99 per cent of those in low- and middle-income countries (United Nations, 2020). This is 'exacerbating pre-existing education disparities', with girls particularly at risk of dropping out of school, and will lead to a host of cascading socio-economic consequences (*ibid.*).

The UN celebrates 'innovation within the education sector' (*ibid.*) focusing particularly on 'connectivity' and remote learning. Indeed, UNICEF (2020) notes that 'more than 90 per cent of ministries of education enacted some form of policy to provide digital and broadcast remote learning'. However, it also reports that a third of the world's schoolchildren – 463 million – cannot be reached by remote learning programmes, especially in poor and rural areas; and it is also notable that many of the 'digital learning solutions' for schools listed (but not endorsed) by UNESCO's Education Response website [2] are commercial English-language platforms.

This development goes to the heart of this book.

The pandemic is accelerating a new, urgent global response to the human development crisis: 'breaking with the past … redesign[ing] the way we work' (UNDP, 2020); but it will be a failure if the world's response to the pandemic leads to the establishment of a more monolingual, top-down hegemony, or a vision of diversity and inclusion that does not have communication and multilingualism at its core.

Now more than ever, we need to think about language and the SDGs.

2.   See https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/solutions

Overview of the chapters

Twenty-one chapters were selected representing the diversity of the conference itself. Five were originally written in French; it is important to note that this volume will be published in both French and English with all chapters translated into the other language. Seven chapters are the result of research in Senegal; as with all previous LDCs, there is a mixture of chapters with an international focus and chapters with a local focus on the host country.

The first sub-theme on multilingualism for quality, equitable and inclusive education (corresponding to SDG 4) has been split into two parts (policy and practice) although there is much overlap between the two; and many chapters in this book cut across more than one of the sub-themes and are indeed relevant to SDGs beyond SDGs 4, 8 and 16.

Part 1: Multilingualism for quality, equitable and inclusive education – perspectives on policy (SDG 4: Quality education)

We begin with three chapters evaluating the current situation of multilingual education in Africa and the Global South more widely, identifying current priorities for this agenda – in particular, valuing and supporting local experiences and initiatives.

Carol Benson's chapter is an overview of multilingual education in the learner's home language – what is working and what is slowing us down. She reviews research, policy and practice, as well as evolutions in terminology, including a reminder that there are concepts and terminologies outside the anglophone sphere when considering these issues. She identifies problems including weak multilingual education models such as 'early exit', widespread assessment in L2 (the child's second language) and parents preferring L2 for their children, but also identifies successful initiatives around the world that could be applied to Africa.

Next, **Barbara Trudell** looks at the impact of globalisation on curriculum in Africa. In a context where globalised goals, indicators and curricula are being adopted worldwide, is there space for the local in Africa? This chapter looks at the paradox that globalised curriculum actually results in a diversity of outcomes in practice, due to the decoupling of institutional practice from policy. It describes successful examples of local ownership of curriculum, whose short-lived natures highlight the need for institutional support if such initiatives are to succeed.

Kathleen Heugh's chapter is a call to 'reclaim' the centuries of experience in Africa and the Global South in terms of multilingualism. She argues that recent research in this field in the Global North is not superior to, or necessarily transferable to, the long lineage of African scholarship and that there is much the North can learn from the South's experience. She explores the multiplicity of multilingualisms that exist and describes how code-switching, translanguaging and 'transknowledging' form the basis of multilingualism for the 21st century, benefiting all students in all contexts.

Next, we move on to three chapters which show very different examples of initiatives which are rooted in local priorities and grassroots knowledge to achieve successful multilingual education, in ways that can challenge some of the global norms.

Mary Goretti Nakabugo, one of the conference keynotes, describes the movement in citizen-led assessment (CLA) which began in India and now takes place in countries around the world, including in East Africa, where over 1.5 million children have been assessed this way – she herself is country co-ordinator for Uganda. CLA has some significant differences compared with traditional learning assessments, such as taking place in the home and being done orally, through volunteers. She describes the principles at work and gives strong evidence of the effectiveness and policy results.

Shannon Bischoff and Mary Encabo discuss the value of partnerships between policymakers (top-down) and community-based and grassroots initiatives (bottom-up) and describe three very different case studies of community-led complementary schools in North America – an alternative form of education promoting mother tongue-based education, multilingualism, and multiculturalism. They argue that complementary schools can support the achievement of common goals in sustainable development and that allowing community members some ownership of the sustainable development agenda is crucial, with reference to several SDGs.

Finally, **Friederike Lüpke, Aimé Césaire Biagui, Landing Biaye, Julienne Diatta, Alpha Naby Mané, Gérard Preira, Jérémi Fahed Sagna and Miriam Weidl** describe the LILIEMA project in Casamance, Senegal: a language-independent method for achieving culturally anchored literacy in multilingual contexts. The chapter opens with a critique of the limitations of current mother tongue-based education policies in highly plurilingual societies such as Casamance, where the concept of a single mother tongue as the language of instruction does not correspond with people's lived reality. Inspired by multilingual oral and written communicative practices that already exist and are widespread throughout West Africa, the LILIEMA approach is described in detail with examples and an appraisal of its success.

Part 2: Multilingualism for quality, equitable and inclusive education – perspectives on practice (SDG 4: Quality education)

We begin this section with three chapters looking at bilingual education models taking place on the ground in Senegal with institutional backing.

Chris Darby and Jorunn Dijkstra describe a longitudinal study of the EMiLe bilingual education project in Senegal. They describe how Cummins' language interdependence hypothesis was built into this programme with some necessary compromises, and record substantial success in the bilingual group's literacy results compared to the monolingual group, using early grade reading assessments conducted in the L2, French, which is actually a foreign language to most of the children.

Ndiémé Sow presents her research into the implementation of ELAN-Afrique, a major bilingual education programme implemented by La Francophonie in eight African countries, involving 225,000 pupils in 2,500 schools and 35 African languages. As with Lüpke et al., her case study is in Casamance. She concentrates on the choice of the medium of instruction in highly multilingual situations where choosing one language creates competition between languages, a process she calls 'multicephalism'. Based on her analysis of pupils' linguistic repertoires, she argues that language in education policy should evolve towards a more inclusive and plurilingual model.

Augustin Ndione also provides an analysis of the ELAN-Afrique programme, this time in a primary school in a village in Thiès region, Senegal. Again focusing on the impact of choosing a language of instruction which, while a 'national language' understood by all pupils, is not their mother tongue, he argues that such a policy carries inherent risks for the preservation of minority languages and their cultures' systems of representation. He presents evidence that parents would prefer to choose their own language if possible.

Finally, two chapters which focus on teachers themselves as perhaps the most important actors in terms of the implementation of language policy in the classroom.

Caroline Juillard argues that teachers need to be much better understood by researchers and policymakers. The two case studies she presents from within a single Senegalese primary school show that many teachers replicate the teaching and training which they themselves received, resulting in significant differences between attitudes and multilingual practices in classrooms.

In her chapter, **Ann Rossiter** gives a snapshot of teachers' purposeful multilingual choices in Sierra Leone, where the official medium of instruction is English. Her description of the mismatch between the official policy of English as the medium of instruction and practice in the classroom leads her to argue for an alignment of policy with practice to include translanguaging and a higher profile for, and inclusion of, local languages in education.

Part 3: Language, skills and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth)

The chapters in this section provide examples of the social and economic benefits of local language literacy, and call for economic policies that include local languages for economic development to include the majority of the population.

Bridging the previous section and this one, **Ian Cheffy** makes an appeal for sustainable development to expand its focus from being too narrowly on children's education by showing the immediately transformative power of adult education. His case studies of three individuals from Kenya, Ethiopia and Cameroon demonstrate tangible improvements in their personal development and social standing, better earnings and more agency in economic activity, and benefits to their immediate communities. This chapter argues that local language literacy for adults is vital if the SDGs are to be achieved.

Paulin G Djité, one of the conference keynotes, shows how economic growth in Africa is inequitable and non-inclusive. He specifically looks at the Ebola epidemic in West Africa to show the impact of crises on economic development and the central role of language and communication in development. He argues that one of the main obstacles to inclusive growth is the marginalisation of the great majority of Africans in the economy, undergirded by the lack of a voice through the marginalisation of their languages. He calls for language experts to work with researchers in other disciplines to reach out to policymakers.

Salikoko S Mufwene, also a keynote speaker at the conference, considers the 'chicken-and-egg' situation: which comes first, adequate education or economic development? And what is the role of language within this equation? He develops an argument for a shift in how Africa thinks of its education and economy, and that economies need to be diversified to become based on an inclusion of the majority, which means recalibrating economies to be based on local languages and local terms and values, not international languages and values.

Part 4: Communication, peace and justice (SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions)

In the final section of this book, a common theme is the struggle to find a space for local languages and inclusion in legal and political frameworks that are internationally defined and/or based on the systems and languages of the former colonial powers, or of the host country (for refugees).

Ahmat Hessana provides an insight into how a language such as Kalam Arabic, spoken by millions of people across the Lake Chad Basin, covering large parts of the Sahara and Sahel across several countries, can be crucial for peace, justice and social cohesion and yet is poorly

recognised and understood by the international system. He presents three case studies showing the role of this language in galvanising young people and community groups to achieve social rights and democratic and local governance representation, including engaging with the SDGs, and a wider role facilitating social cohesion and intercommunal peace through marriages and funerals.

Jimmy Harmon provides a comparative study of local language literacy issues in two neighbouring islands in the South West Indian Ocean: Reunion Island (an administrative division of France) and the Republic of Mauritius. Both settings have French-based Creole as the vernacular language, but this language is a 'site of struggle' of mother tongue-based literacy in education policy in both countries, shaped by different postcolonial legacies and legal/educational frameworks, as it does not necessarily fit the predominant 'one nation' discourse.

The next two chapters look specifically at the legal systems in francophone Africa which are based on French law and conducted in French.

Natalie Tarr and Aly Sambou compare the histories and practice of legal translation in the courts of Burkina Faso and Senegal and include data from interviews with judges, court interpreters and prisoners. Although the historical, colonial legacy of the French legal system and language is entrenched in both legal systems, they show that linguistic accommodation does exist in these systems in response to communication necessities. However, they argue that courts are also an extreme manifestation of a perpetuation of colonial power structures through language and that ultimately the justice system fails to provide equal access to justice for all.

In their chapter, **Mouhamed Abdallah Ly, Abdourahmane Seck and Yamar Samb** make a pluridisciplinary argument that the law in Senegal is both inaccessible and unintelligible through its being set and conducted in an obscure form of French; and that this not only perpetuates the concentration of power among a small elite but also undermines democracy and the law itself, because people turn to parallel, customary legal systems and disengage from politics. They discuss the limits of translation and argue instead for a pluridisciplinary, plurilingual and 'multi-legal' approach.

Finally, three chapters explore language issues for refugees in education and more widely, where the links to human rights, identity and acquiring skills are particularly acute and can provide useful universal lessons.

Chris Sowton argues that the diverse nature of refugee camps exposes a weakness in the 'Westphalian' SDG model based on international norms and country-specific goals and indicators when the populations concerned are not from the country they reside in, by definition. He discusses the issue of medium of instruction for education; the importance for refugee populations to acquire language skills; and the complexity of language

and power for refugees within camps and outside them, and argues that decisions in these contexts must be rooted in pragmatism.

In his chapter, **Alexis Lefranc** describes his own trajectory as a teacher of English to Syrian refugees in Lebanon as he developed an understanding of digital literacy and information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D). He explains why digital literacy is an essential new skill for development. He argues that the real digital divide is not access to technology but skills in using it, and that development experts must wake up to the importance of this emerging field or risk being sidelined by tech entrepreneurs who may lack the pedagogical and/or policy background.

Anne Wiseman describes a British Council project working with the government of Lebanon to integrate Syrian refugees into Lebanese classrooms. She describes how the project's social model of inclusion and a focus on teacher training, including encouraging classroom use of translanguaging, led to positive changes in attitudes, practice and government education policy.

Key messages from the 12th Language and Development Conference

The following key messages can be identified as emerging from the 12th Language and Development Conference. (Chapters in this book which discuss these issues are indicated in brackets.)

The SDGs should be updated to include specific references to language (in the targets and their indicators).

- Current international data tools (such as EGRA or TIMMS) should be reappraised with both their value and limitations recognised; and evidence such as that gathered by citizen-led assessment and a more qualitative approach could be integrated further (Trudell, Nakabugo, Benson, Cheffy, and Darby & Dijkstra).

The SDGs and other global development agendas should evolve to give space to local context and accommodate different value systems.

- We should consider the existence in development of a 'Northern' agenda, built on Western concepts and structures in which business is conducted primarily in the major European languages; and make space for 'Southern' agendas and communication in non-international languages to broaden the scope and meaning of the development agenda (Heugh, Lüpke et al., Trudell, Benson, Djité, Mufwene, Hessana, Bischoff & Encabo, and Sowton).
- Increasing human mobility challenges the development agenda to embrace diversity rather than 'one size fits all' (Heugh and Sowton).

- Development agencies must listen to the populations they work with. This means meaningful consultation with them, in their own languages (Nakabugo, Trudell, Bischoff & Encabo, and Ly et al.).

The best way to achieve the SDGs is to empower people themselves to do it.

- The SDGs should be translated into all languages and communicated to all populations in their own languages (Hessana and Ly et al.).
- Locally driven development models are often best – but they need institutional support (Trudell, Bischoff & Encabo, Mufwene, and Djité).
- Languages need to be properly equipped before they can take on the function of being the medium of development, for example through language revitalisation and documentation; work on terminology and codification; clear language and education policies; language status and recognition in institutional structures; and advocacy and changing populations' attitudes towards their own language (Hessana, Tarr & Sambou, Ly et al., and Harmon).

Policymakers, researchers and people on the ground need to collaborate, and linguists need to recruit other disciplines to the language cause and prove its multidisciplinary relevance (Djité, Trudell, and Bischoff & Encabo).

- Advocacy is necessary at both policy level and population level. Populations' own preference for an international language over their own is rational and detectable from an early age, but this attitude can be changed with evidence (Lüpke et al., Benson, Sow, and Hessana).
- The Asia Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group [3] has been successful in delivering the right messages at policy level. The creation of a similar group for the Africa region would be welcome (while recognising that regions have differences as well as issues in common).

SDG 4: Education is foundational to all the SDGs.

- Mother tongue-based multilingual education is now widely accepted to be the right approach and great progress is being made (Benson and Trudell), although there are issues to be considered in identifying a 'mother tongue' and selecting a single language of instruction in many plurilingual settings (Lüpke et al., Sow, Ndione, Darby & Dijkstra) in terms of effective learning, issues of identity and safeguarding languages and cultures. Further, the development agenda has much to learn from the existing knowledge and experience in the Global South (Heugh, Bischoff & Encabo, and Lüpke et al.).
- There should be more focus on teachers' skills, training and languages (Juillard and Rossiter).

- There should be more citizen-led assessment to measure what is really happening on the ground (Nakabugo).
- Universities' widespread use of English (or other major international languages) as the medium of instruction marginalises most people (Bischoff & Encabo and Mufwene).
- Adult education must be a priority too: literacy changes people's lives (Cheffy and Trudell).

SDG 8: Language is the foundation of sustainable economic development.

- Language is the basis of the skills, communication and participation through which populations can play an active role in socio-economic development (Cheffy, Djité, and Mufwene).
- We must develop economies and jobs based on local languages. It is not necessarily the case that international languages are key to economic development (Djité and Mufwene).

SDG 16: Peace, justice and democracy cannot be achieved without taking into account language rights/language status (Hessana, Harmon, Ly et al., and Tarr & Sambou).

- Institutional structures based on ex-colonial languages, structures and laws perpetuate the dominance of these ex-colonial languages and power structures, to the exclusion of most people. Populations have no faith in institutions and systems which are not in their language (Ly et al. and Tarr & Sambou).
- Regional and national judicial, legal and institutional systems can learn from the pioneering work and expertise of the International Criminal Court.
- Language rights are central to education which is inclusive of groups such as refugees, internally displaced persons and deaf people (Sowton and Wiseman).
- Digital literacy is an emerging divide in sustainable development (Lefranc).

If there is a unifying thread across this book, it is that the SDGs are global, by definition – but their real application is local, even individual. This book is about how these two ends of the spectrum interact and influence each other, a process which, to be inclusive for all, can only be done through language and communication.

We hope readers find these chapters useful and that they will contribute to the post-Covid-19 sustainable development agenda, and the place of language within it.

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3.   https://asiapacificmle.net/

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