Securing Nigeria's Future and Security Through Indigenous Languages for Sustainable Development

Haruna Abbas
Department of Hausa,
Federal University of Education, Zaria

Abstract

Language is land and land are language or better still language is culture and culture is language. It is in this light that this paper examines the importance of maintaining and revitalizing indigenous languages (especially Hausa), which in turn, will ensure the future and security of Nigeria particularly in this time of humanitarian and climate crises. Thusly, the paper starts by conceptualizing indigenous languages as well as looking at Hausa as an indigenous language. The paper also examines why indigenous languages are important. It also assesses the effects of colonization on indigenous languages. The paper further dissects the connections/responsibilities embedded in indigenous languages such as the traditional ecological knowledge. As the way forward, the paper looks at how the aforesaid areas could be used to enhance security and national development. Consequently, the paper concludes that because language is culture and culture is language, indigenous languages offer unique ways of understanding and relating to the world and that safe guiding them is vital for addressing the many forms of humanitarian and climate crises besieging Nigeria. As the method, the paper consults relevant multiple sources so as to avoid fallacies, misunderstanding and other shortcomings behind the various positions, with a view to taking a stand on the subject. Base on the conclusion, the paper recommends among others that Nigeria as a country should adopt inclusive policies that will help to preserve the existence of indigenous languages, cultures and knowledge.

Keywords*: Nigeria's Future, Security indigenous languages, Sustainable development*

Corresponding Author: **Haruna Abbas**

Background to the Study

The symbolic like relationship between Nigeria as a country and her security and national development has for a long time been compromised. According to Pearce and Barbier (2000), the interplay between the environment and economy is at the heart of sustainable development. In this light, Nigeria is faced with a lot of security issues and developmental challenges such as high rate of poverty, income inequality, unemployment, conflicts (religious and tribal), and violence (domestic, religious and tribal) among others, with about 70 percent of its population living in poverty (Akhemonkhan, et al, 2012).

Nigeria has on daily basis, experienced an upsurge of activities that threatens and endangers her national security. The Nigerian nation suddenly metamorphosed into an abode of insecurity. It is based on this that the question of national security and sustainable development arises. Here, it is important to underscore the crucial constituents of sustainable development namely: Environment, economy and society (Mensah, 2019). Thus, it is important here for Nigerians and the Nigerian policy makers to be acutely aware between the interplay and interdependence among those elements. The society that breeds indigenous languages is the one that enhances national development and sustainable development.

Hausa as an indigenous language only hold vital information about scientific and traditional knowledge on ecosystem, conservation and sustainability that benefits whole (Nigerian) society. Further, indigenous scientific and traditional knowledge on ecosystem, conservation methods, plants life, animal behavior and many others that are embedded in indigenous languages (Lapier, 2018). This regression of indigenous languages (such as Hausa) also diminishes the possibility of (Hausa) indigenous knowledge to contribute and provide a foundation for sustainable development. In this sense, it is important to promote Hausa indigenous knowledge in the Nigerian search for security, national development and sustainability. It is in this light that this paper proposes the use of traditional knowledge of ecosystem, conservation methods for sustainability that benefits the Nigerian society.

Conceptualizing Indigenous Languages

Indigenous languages are deeply intertwined with the cultural, historical and environmental contexts of the communities that speak them, reflecting their traditions, beliefs and connection to the land (Norton, 2013). Indigenous languages, based on Norton's conception, are those languages by native's inhabitants of a particular geographic area (Hausa- North, Yoruba- West and Igbo- East) before colonization or with heavy influence from another culture. In other words, indigenous communities and their languages are long-established in other regions, existing well before modern borders and colonialism and have developed over millennia. Because language is culture and culture are language, indigenous languages transmit unique ways of understanding and relating to the world. Thusly, safeguarding indigenous languages like Hausa is vital for addressing the Nigeria's future, security and sustainability.

Concept of Security

According to Williams (2008:6), "security as an essential concept is commonly associated with alleviation of threats to cherished values, especially the survival of individuals, groups, or

objects in the near future". Adebakun (2012:8) expands the security to cover "activities that ensures protection of a country, persons, properties of the community against future threats, danger, mishaps, and all other forms of perils". Babangida (2011) gives another dimension to the concept of security when he posits that, it is the physical protection and defense of our citizens and our territorial integrity and also the promotion of the economic well-being and posterity of Nigerians in a safe and secure environment that promotes the attainment of our national interests and those of our foreign partners. To this paper, the definition by Babangida (2011) is the most comprehensive.

Other researchers and scholars assert that security means protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life in homes, offices or communities (Otto and Ukpere, 2012, Adebakin, 2012). To Chris (2012) security must be related to the presence of peace, safety, happiness and the protection of physical resources or the absence of crisis, threats to human injury and others.

Further, Orji (2012) posits that pivotal to the survival of any society is law and order which are predicated on national security. Other areas that cover national security are economic, environmental, and demographic issue as they are important in the understanding of new causes of intra-state conflict. Other dangers that serve as threats to national security according to (Onigbinde, 2008) include poverty, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards. Finally, the United Nation Development Program (1994 and 1996) posits that human security (an aspect of human security) refers to; Freedom from fear and freedom from want and safety from chronic threats such as hunger, diseases, and repression as well as protection from sudden harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities. Based on the above, it is apparent that national security is not only desideratum but also sine qua non for the sustainable developments in Nigeria. Based on this, indigenous languages (Hausa in particular) have a role to play in the national security of Nigeria.

Sustainable Development
The concept of sustainable development has been there for decades and as a modern concept, it was originally brought forward by the Gno Harlem Brundtland in 1987 (United Nations, 1987). The report simply defined it as;
1. Development that meets the needs of the present world without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
2. The report further offers the guiding principles of sustainable development as living within environmental limits, ensuring a strong, healthy and just society, achieving a sustainable economy, promoting good governance and utilizing information and communication technology as social responsibility.

The goal of sustainable development was first adopted by the United Nations Members States in 2015 under three pillars:
a. Economic Sustainability: This strives to promote those activities through which long-term economic growth can be achieved without having a negative compact on the

environmental, social, and cultural aspects of the community. Who is in better position to understand their environment more that its Indigenes?

b. Social Sustainability: This refers to as a form of social responsibilities that significantly takes place when a community's stable and unstable components need to revival of depleted resources. It combines the design of the physical environment with the social environment and focuses on the need's different sections in a community and put special emphasis on providing the right infrastructure and required support to weaker section.

c. Cultural Sustainability: Culture is seen as the main component of the concept of sustainable development. The need for cultural sustainability arises from the growing awareness of the importance of cultural rights and the preservation of cultural heritage (Jarvie, 2017).

To this paper, the concept of sustainable development is an essential one to understand in contemporary times as it can help, it addresses some grave economic, social, and environmental concerns. The best way to do this, in the estimation of this paper, is through the lens of indigenous languages such as Hausa. This question is pertinent to this paper, who understands Nigeria's economy, social life and culture more than Nigerians?

Hausa as an Indigenous Language
According to the Herald (2019), Hausa is the 11th most spoken language in the world with about 150 million native and non-native speakers. It belongs to the western Chadic language superfamily within the Afro-Asiatic phylum. The home territories of the indigenous Hausa people lie on both sides of the border between Niger, where about one-half of the population speaks Hausa as first language and Nigeria, where about one-fifth of the population (230 million) speaks Hausa as first language. The language is used in the media, education, and government.

Hausa as an indigenous language, is the de facto provincial language in the northern region and in Nigeria generally, the Nigerian constitution, Chapter 5. Part I. Section 55 states: The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefor. Thus, Hausa is an officially recognized language used in education, governance, trade and inter-ethnic communication.

Since the beginning of the 17th century, Hausa has been written with a version of the Arabic Script known as 'Ajami' mainly to write poetry, but also for at least one newspaper and some books. Due to lack of standard spelling of the 'Ajami' version, a version of Hausa written with the Latin alphabets and known as 'Boko' began to emerge during the 19th century. Until the 1950s, ajami and boko were just used, but the book alphabets now dominate especially in academic and formal context (Wolff, 2024). Because of the Hausa standard orthography, in every aspect of the language, it is now one of the widely taught African language in universities worldwide. There are a number of pedagogical grammars, dictionaries, and readers available (Paul, 2000). Based on these persons (1961:6) posits that:

By any standard in a great language, second to none in its writing, its pithiness and pungency and at the same time in its flexibility and variety and in the wealth of its vocabulary.

To buttress this, Bunza (2002) provides information on how Hausa orthography is operated; purposely for both teachers and learners. More significantly, he explains various aspects of Hausa orthography from its history to it continues existence. Furthermore, he describes some common mistakes that are usually committed and how they should be rectified. Thusly, Bunza and other scholars in the field, laid a sound foundation for the Hausa language to be used in education and it is through education that the future, security, and sustainable development could be achieved in the Nigerian context.

Revitalizing Indigenous Languages

Language is more than a tool for communication, it is profound reflection of cultural identity, heritage and worldview (Language Access Canada, 2024). The erosion of indigenous languages (especially those reduced to writing), driven by historical injustices and colonial polices, has far-reaching consequences for the ability to understand the future, security and sustainable development of Nigeria.

From an educational perspective, the role of language in shaping cognitive development, critical thinking and problem-solving skills is key to successful education efforts (McCarty et al, 2019). Indigenous languages carry unique worldviews and ways of understanding only the environmental but also its security and sustainability, enriching the experience for Nigerian learners in general. For indigenous languages to be relevant to the future, security and sustainable development, their revitalization depends on collaborative efforts between indigenous communities, educational institutions, governmental bodies, and non-profit organizations. Here, these elements will come together to empower indigenous languages to perform their functions in the society. The revitalization of indigenous languages is seen as multi-faceted endeavor with profound implications for the health and wellbeing of Nigeria's indigenous languages. Understanding the historical context, the link between language, nature and culture, and the positive impacts of psychological, emotional, social and educational dimensions provides a comprehensive perspective on the heating power of linguistic revitalization.

Thusly, there is the need in Nigeria, for language policies and collaborative initiative to ensure bridges between Nigerian indigenous languages and other languages contributing to reconciliation (in case of security britches). This will enable the Nigerian indigenous languages to contribute to a more inclusive, divers, and culturally rich Nigerian landscape, where the healing power of the indigenous Nigerian languages reverberates across generations. The healing of the indigenous Nigerian languages is what she needs to ensure her future, security and sustained development. For revitalization of indigenous languages, as prescribed by the UN General Assembly's International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019, most, if not all of the indigenous languages should turn towards accessible technology to save and revitalize their languages.

Connection/ Responsibilities Embedded in Indigenous Languages

Languages are one of the most significant emblems of human diversity, revealing how its speakers perceive, relate to, and understand the world differently (UNESCO). This is in line with the stand of the Sapper-Whorl (Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis). The hypothesis states that:

> *Grammatical and verbal structure of a person's (native) language influences how they perceive the world. It emphasizes that either language determines or influence one's thought (Frothingham, 2023).*

Thusly, languages are vehicles of people's cultures; that is, they are essential components of people's identity. Here, indigenous languages are not merely a tool for communication, they are:

a. Central to indigenous peoples' identity, the preservation of their cultures, worldviews and visions and something critical to them: an expression of their self-determination and existence (Lapier, 2018).

b. Hold vital information about scientific and traditional knowledge on ecosystems, conservation and sustainability that benefit the whole of the society. In essence, any time an indigenous language is pushed aside, the millennial knowledge of culture is not used, it diminishes the possibility of these languages to provide a foundation for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2022).

c. Inclusive policies can help reverse the trends and preserve the existence (and functions) of indigenous languages, cultures and knowledge.

d. The regression of indigenous languages also diminishes their possibility to contribute for sustainable development. In this context, it is particularly important to promote the inclusion of indigenous languages in global climate science and related policy process (UNESCO, 2022).

e. Concerning the justice system, indigenous people are important. Indigenous languages should contribute to every stage of legal and criminal processes. They should be involved in legislation, policies and law enforcement strategies. This will ensure that indigenous people can understand and be understood in political, legal, and administrative proceedings.

Based on this, there is the need for indigenous languages to decolonize indigenous knowledge so that they can occupy an active position not only within Nigeria but also to the global villages. Indigenous knowledge can also decolonize through emancipatory research that step away from western limiting approaches. By so doing, indigenous knowledge is presented as tools for ensuring Nigerian's future, security and new sustainable development agenda informed by the idea of sustainable entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to assess the future and security of Nigeria through the use of indigenous languages for sustainable development. In conclusion, it is worth noting that Nigeria has for long been grounded on the ideas of western epistemologies, this often does not capture the uniqueness of her context, particularly as it affects her future, society and

sustainability. In line with this, it is high time indigenous languages' approaches to research design and implementation, towards security and sustainable development goals as well as associated challenges and opportunities are considered. The contributions also advanced knowledge, theory and practices of indigenous methodologies as they affect Nigeria's future, her security and sustainable development.

In the estimation of this paper, that it is about time that Nigeria has a fusion of indigenous languages in her political, social and economic life as well as her future. Much more remain to be done, especially outside the realm of English language as the official language. Despite the fact that Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are also official languages in Nigeria, they have no reflection of indigenous knowledge system and local knowledge of populations as it affects Nigeria's future, security and sustainable developments.

References

Adebakin, M. A. (2012). National security challenges and its sustainable economic development: Enhance evidence from Nigeria, *Journal of Business and Management Review, 1,* 77-99.

Akhemonkhan, A. I., Raimi, L. & Ogunjiri, O. D. (2012). *Corporate social responsibility and entrepreneurship ((CSPE): Anti-dots to poverty, insecurity and underdevelopment in Nigeria*, being a paper presented at 6th international conference, held in University de Lome, Togo, November 1 – 2.

Babangida, M. A. (2012). *The search for national security in Nigeria: Challenges and prospect*s. being a paper presented at the Obafemi Awolowo Institute of Government and Public Policy, Agip Recital Hall, Muson – Lagos.

Bunza, A. M. (2002). *Rubutun Hausa: Yadda Yake da Ake Yinsa,* Lagos: Ibrash Islamic Publication Centre Ltd.

Chris, I. N. (2012). Security challenges and Economy of the Nigerian state 2001 – 2011. *American Journal of Contemporary Research, 2*(6), 244 – 248.

Federal Government of Nigeria (1999). *Chapter 5. Part 1. Section 55. Nigerian Constitution*, Retrieved from https://www.nigerianconstitution.com

Jarvie, M. I. (2017). *Brundtland report: Publication by world commission on environment development*, Retrieved from https://www.Aritannica.com

Language Access Coalition of Canada (2024). *The healing power of indigenous languages revitalization*. Retrieved from https://www.languageadvocacyday.org

Lapier, R. (2018). *How the loss of native American languages Affects our understanding of the natural world*, htttps://theconvasation.com

McCarty, T. L., Nicholas, S. E. & Wigglesworth, G. (2011). *The world of indigenous language: Politics, pedagogies and prospects for language reclamation*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Mensah, J. (20199). Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars and implications for human action. *Literature Review: Cognate Social Science, 5 (1).*

Newman, P. (2000). *The Hausa language: An encyclopedia reference grammar*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Norton, J. (2023). *What is an indigenous language*? Retrieved from https://www.mayabridge.org.

Onigbinde, D. (2008). *National resource management and its implication on national and sub-regional security: The case of Niger Delta*. KAIPTC Paper No. 22. Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution Department.

Orji, K. E. (2012). National security and sustainable development in Nigeria: Challenges from the Niger Delta. *African Research Review, 6 (1), 198 – 201.*

Pearce, D. & Barbier, E. (2000). *Blueprint for a sustainable economy*, London: Earthscan Publication.

Pearsons, F. W. (1961). Hausa language is virile, Pithy and flexible. In *Nigerian Citizen, August 9, P6.*

The Herald (2019). *Full – use: Hausa language is World's 11th Most spoken language*, Retrieved from https://www.herald.ng.

Trothingham, M. B. (2023). Sapar – *Wharf hypothesis: linguistics relativity hypothesis*, Retrieved from https://www.simplepsychology.org

UNESCO (2018). *Atlas of the world's languages in Danger*, Retrieved from https://unesco.org

United Nation Development Programme (1996). *United nation development programme: Human development repo*rt, Lagos.

Williams, P. (2008). *Violent Non-state actors and national and international security: International relations and security network series*, Zurich: Swiss Institute of Technology.