

**Beyond expanding the functions of threatened languages; expanding the life opportunities of communities who speak them.** Economic empowerment and language revitalization in critical socio-economic conditions in Africa.

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The Bati speech community (Cameroon)

# Acknowledgment

- ICLDC5 Organizing and Review Committees
- ComputEL-2 Organizing Committee
- Pan-African Institute for Development

# The questions being addressed in this presentation

- Do Language Documentation (LD) and Revitalization (LR), as implemented in Africa, REALLY benefit the target communities?
- If not, how can we change that?

# Lessons from personal experiences

## Bakola (2010-2012)-

### DOBES

Amount of grant

160,000 Euros

#### Outcomes:

- Online corpus
- PhD thesis
- Presentations & articles

#### Impact

- Three-year guaranteed Income for 02 researchers
- Capacity building of team members
- Promotion of team members in the academia
- Long term preservation of the language heritage

What about the community?

## Bati (2016—) - ELDP

Amount of grant

30,000 £

#### Expected outcomes:

- Online corpus
- 02 PhD thesis
- Dictionary, grammar, stories book, syllabary, video documentary

#### Impact:

- Capacity building of team members
- Resources for literacy, MT education, language revitalization
- Long term preservation of the language heritage
- Promotion of team members in the academia

Does the community REALLY feel the impact ??

# Are the scholars' and the communities's agenda congruent?

## The researcher's agenda

- Safeguarding of the language heritage (more or less strong!)
- Data collection for scientific inquiry (very strong!)
- Assisting the community in language development efforts (more or less strong!)
- Academic self fulfillment (strong!)
- Capacity building in the scholarship (strong!)

## The community's agenda

- Coping with daily survival (very strong!)
- Ensuring a better future for the kids (very strong!)
- Socio-economic empowerment and security of the group (strong!)
- Safeguarding of language heritage (more or less strong, often peripheral)
- Language & cultural revitalization (more or less, often peripheral)

Who is the intended **ultimate**  
beneficiary?

The community!

# Whose agenda prevails

## The researcher's!

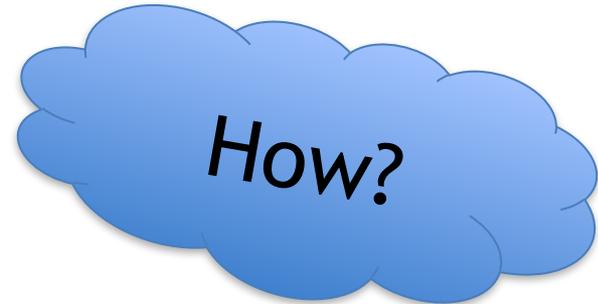
- She/he has access to information about funding opportunities
- She/he is the intermediary between the community and the funding organizations
- She/he is credited to have the required skills and therefore is more likely to be trusted

# Let's make it very clear!!

- The researcher's input remains crucial, but it has to closely connect with the immediate wellbeing of the community
- The researcher's perspective is sometimes a long term one, and might still benefit the community, some day...
- But LD and LR are happening in the midst of the community's social life; ignoring the reality of that social life for long term benefits is like letting the neighbor's house burn because the insurance is going to pay for it, anyway!

# How to better reach a compromise between the two agenda

- Rethinking the order of priorities in the current LD and LR funding models in Africa





# rethink the order of priorities in LD and LR funding initiatives?

- In Cameroon, there appears to be a correlation between language vitality and the community's wellbeing (Ngué Um, Makasso, Makon and Assomo forthcoming):
  1. the less economically empowered a community
  2. the less the members are inclined to asserting and performing the group's identity through language use
  3. and the more exposed and endangered their cultural heritage
- African communities whose languages are most endangered also **almost** happen to be the most economically and politically marginalized: e.g. the Bakola, the Bati, the Bezen, etc.



# Case study: language choice and identity performance among Bati as a multilingual speech group

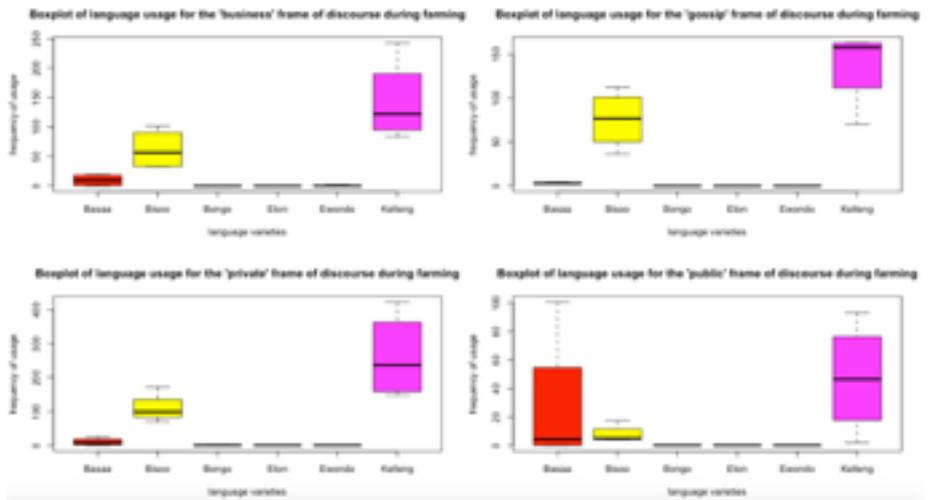


Fig 1: language choice among female peer members during farming

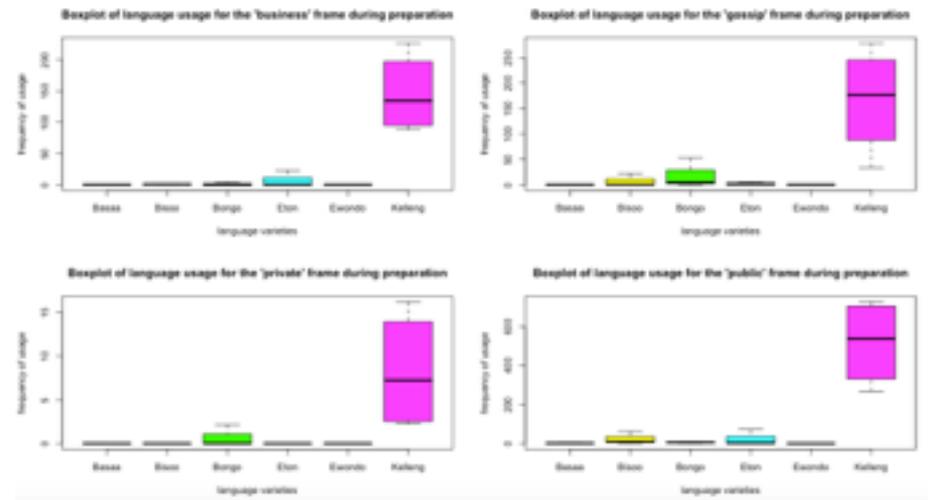


Fig 2: language choice among female peer members in a near public space

# Case study: language choice and identity performance among Bati as a multilingual speech group

Result: the public space as a leverage to group identity performance

## Conclusions of the study:

1. In a multilingual social ecology, Economic and/or political empowerment of a group leverages the group member's pride to belong to the group
2. The prouder the members feel about their group, the more they are inclined to performing and marketing their group's identity in the public space. E.g Fulani, Beti-Fang, Duala, Basaa
3. Economic empowerment should stand at the forefront of language documentation and revitalization in critically endangered situations in Africa

Because LD is such a vital issue, it HAS TO rely on the community's share-holding and owner-taking

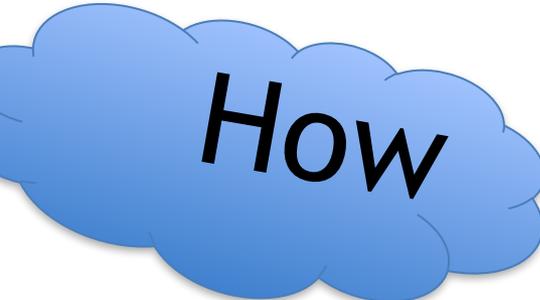
And ought not be reduced to a bargain

- LD and LR cannot be successful and sustainable if, in the course of her/his work, the researcher has to constantly negotiate to calm down her/his consultant's impatience and suspicion, or pay for his time
- Bargaining with consultants implies negotiating with only a few of them, usually less than a dozen in the course of a project. This may be a source of felt discrimination and frustration by non-involved community members.



Why?

Because LD and LR efforts need to serve the community's existential needs, and not the other way round



**How**

do we make that happen ?

First and foremost:

Language and culture maintenance need to be recognized as full-fledged components of the human development agenda

Implementation of language and culture maintenance in Africa cannot be successful and sustainable without the involvement of economic actors: Linguistics alone cannot do anymore!!!

# How

## Connect Languages and Development



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08.12.2016 - Geneva Office

### United Nations General Assembly proclaims 2019 as the International Year of indigenous Languages and invites UNESCO to take the lead



22 November 2016, United Nations Headquarters New York – Today, the 55th meeting of the 3rd Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, saw the adoption of the resolution on “Rights of indigenous peoples”. Among others, the resolution stresses the urgent need to preserve, promote and revitalize

endangered languages, and further proclaims 1 January 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages, inviting UNESCO to “serve as the lead agency for the Year.”

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# A two-in-one approach

- **Priority to socio-economic empowerment**

1. Identification of the most urgent and vital needs of the community, for the community, and with the community
2. Operationalization of socio-economic strategies to address these needs, for, by and with the community
3. Implementation of development projects:
  - Optimization of income generating activities
  - Monetization of the community's cultural heritage: revitalization of heritage cultural performances
  - Community radios as :
    - A. vectors of language promotion
    - B. cultural marketing and monetization
    - C. group identity promotion and lobbying

# A two-in-one approach

- **LD and LR as derived products of socio-economic empowerment**
  1. Promoting the local language through training activities, group meetings, public gatherings, project's management, project's accountancy etc.
  2. Promoting the knowledge of the local language as a marketable and professional skill through the radio and cultural performances
  3. Documentation by the researcher (linguist) of language use in the course of above-mentioned socio-economic activities

# Advantages of the model

- **Owner-taking of language documentation and revitalization initiatives by the community**
  1. Better understanding by the community of the stakes of LD and LR
  2. The Researcher and the development expert as mere partners, not as patrons.
  3. The product of language documentation no longer a mere commodity for scientific investigation, but also a vivid testimony to, and the memory of the community's social life
  4. No trade off and no bargaining: the bargaining investment will have been invested in socio-economic activities.

# Challenges

- Reshuffling of the LD and LR agenda in Africa
  1. Joint curricula in community development, cultural modeling and cultural maintenance
  2. Increase partnership between development organizations and language/cultural institutions
  3. Funding initiatives to support the set up of community-driven projects

# Perspectives

- **The Pan-African Institute for Development as a candidate for hosting innovative training in :**
  1. community development, cultural modeling and cultural maintenance
  2. Monitoring and follow-up of joint socio-economic and language revitalization projects
  3. Ad hoc expertise delivery in participative development in rural communities.

# Perspectives

- PAID : <http://paidafrica.org>



## Assets:

- Long standing experience in promoting people centered development in Africa: since 1956!!)

- Established network of training centers and resource persons throughout Africa

## Limitations:

- Limited expertise in cultural approaches to development

- Disconnection with language and cultural institutions in Africa

# Recommendations

In line with Ruth Rouvier, Joanne Knapp-Philo, and Tracy Hirata-Edds's presentation this morning during the first session of Workshop 3:

"

- Create inter-professional networks
- integration of research and practice
- prioritized community -initiated, community-monitored, and community followed-up projects
- Documentation of, and through revitalization

"

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