Placing languages and culture in interventions for sustainable national development in Ghana

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Abstract

Languages play a critical role in sustaining culture. This is exemplified in the fact that it is through languages people find their identities and understand their culture. For many years, Ghana has struggled to have a consistent language policy. This paper seeks to examine the current role of local Ghanaian languages in education in the sustenance of culture for national development. This paper illustrates the fact that without the use of language and culture as a critical tool for national development, it would practically be impossible to achieve most of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To help illustrate this point, historical documentary research approach was used to trace the role of language and culture in national development, and to figure out how language and culture could help achieve the SDG goal 17. This research concludes that when language and culture form an integral part of sustainable development, it can help promote synergy, trust, loyalty, creativity and the willingness to collaborate and partner to achieve the 17 SDGs by the year 2030. The results also showed that none of the Ghanaian languages has attained the status of an international language because of the multiplicity of languages in the country and also because of the tribal race for supremacy in the country.

Keywords

culture; development; Ghana; language; SDGs; sustainability

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1. Introduction

Sustainability has been a key goal in the 21st century for many international organisations as well as countries. The United Nations (UN) is continuously searching for ways to sustainably address global development challenges. On 25th September 2015, the UN adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets. With such a tall list of aspirations for sustainable development, the responsibility arises for the UN to determine ways of achieving these goals (UN, 2015), which aim at ending poverty, hunger and malnutrition in all its manifestations by the year 2030. These SDGs also seek to ensure the protection of the poor and the vulnerable in the society, and improve the accessibility to fundamental services for all people (UN, 2016). By definition, the most common and comprehensive conceptualisation of the term "sustainability", was captured by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in the "Our Common Future" report (known as Brundtland Report) in the year 1987. This report defines sustainability as "a process aimed at achieving environmental, economic and social improvement, both locally and globally, or a state that can be maintained at a certain level indefinitely. This process binds in, a relationship of interdependence, the protection and enhancement of natural resources to the economic and social, in order to meet the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Thus it is incompatible with the degradation of heritage and natural

resources, but also with the violation of human dignity and human freedom, poverty and economic decline, the lack of recognition of the rights and equal opportunities" (WCED, 1987: 43).

The general concept of this definition by WCED in 1987 considered the compatible combination of social development, economic development, human development and environmental development in reference to both the present and the future. One can therefore say that, to achieve sustainable development, an emphasis should be placed on its three dimensions, namely, social, economic and environmental dimensions. The social dimension of sustainability includes culture and languages. With this, it is safe to say that, for the 2030 SDGs to be successful, language and culture cannot be underestimated and neglected. The cultural aspects of the social dimension of the SDGs comprise of languages, the safeguarding of tangible and intangible cultural heritages, active participation in various cultural activities, the enhancement of individual as well as collective cultural liberties, and the protection and promotion of diverse cultural expressions (United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), 2018; Addaney, 2019). There is therefore a need to ascertain the role of culture and language in the UN's 2030 sustainable development agenda. Even though sustainable development widely covers the economic, environmental and social spheres, it seems a lot more emphasis is laid on environmental and economic growth while the sociocultural domain which houses culture and language (the basis for societal building and development) appears to have been neglected (UCLG, 2018). To achieve the 17 SDGs, language is arguably the tool for conveying the underlying information, relevance and impacts of these goals. However, despite the role language plays in society, its relevance has not been taken into critical account in the debates on the sustainable development agenda. The reality is that, references to culture in the SDGs are scarce and do not sufficiently acknowledge the many ways in which cultural aspects influence and contribute to sustainable development. In other words, language and culture are not seen as major factors when SDGs are discussed (2030 Goal Campaign on the role of Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, 2019: 5).

Against this background, the paper examines the role of Ghanaian languages and culture in promoting sustainable national development. This paper starts by discussing the role and concepts of language and culture, then proceeds to find and discuss the relationship between the two concepts and sustainable development. This paper also examines the place of language and cultural sustainability in achieving sustainable development as well as study their roles in Ghana's sustainable development agenda. The following questions served as a guide for this research:

- To which extent can language and culture help in facilitating and sustaining the achievement of the 17 SDGs in Ghana?

- What role can the use of indigenous languages in education play in sustaining culture and identity for national development?

1.1 Connecting languages and culture to the concept of sustainable development

The term 'culture' is defined by Castells (2009: 36) as "the set of values and beliefs that inform, guide, and motivate people's behaviour". Stajcic (2013: 6) however gives an extended definition of culture as "the set of values, knowledge, language, rituals, habits, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, folklore, rules and customs that identify a particular group of people at a specific point in time", thereby bringing to bare the link between language and culture. There are many points of view on the relationship between language and culture since the two are closely interrelated (Kavakli, 2020). According to Rabiah (2018: 2) some points of view suggest that "language is part of culture but they are different, but in terms of relation they are very close to each other, so it cannot be separated" while others suggest that "language is strongly influenced by culture, so that all things in the culture will be reflected in the language" (Rabiah, 2018: 2). UNESCO (2013) notes that culture plays enormous roles in development and has been increasingly recognised in recent years through ranges of national advocacy efforts. In the UN Secretary General's 2014 report, presented on the role of culture in sustainable development, it was argued that "culture imbues humankind with creativity, critical thinking, empathy, trust, willingness to take risks and mutual respect – to name just a few important traits" (Nordic Culture Point, n.d.: 6). This is because language plays a crucial role not only in the construction of culture but in the emergence of cultural change (Kramsch, 1995: 3). This makes it necessary to connect these two concepts to sustainable development. Scholars (e.g. Adjei, Addaney and Danquah, 2021; Addaney, 2018; Riekmann, 2017) reiterate the fact that ESD requires profound transformation on how individuals think and act, and therefore, it seeks to integrate content on issues such as climate change into the curriculum using pedagogical approaches which make possible the development of the key competencies needed for promoting sustainable development in students. Rieckmann (2017: 55) lists the key teaching and learning approaches in ESD as:

- A learner-centred approach which sees students as autonomous learners and emphasizes the active development of knowledge rather than its mere transfer and/or passive learning experiences.

- Action-oriented learning where learners engage in action and reflect on their experiences in terms of

the intended learning process and personal development. The experience might come from a project (in-service learning), an internship, the facilitation of a workshop, the implementation of a campaign, etc.

- Transformative learning which aims at empowering learners to question and change the ways they see and think about the world in order to deepen their understanding of it."

The successful use of these approaches depends on the role language and culture plays.

2. The role of language in sustainable development

Languages play a critical role in maintaining and sustaining the identity of any group of people. In fact, languages form the basis of cultural identity and unity among many ethnic groups in most African countries. The history of the various ethnic groups can be traced through their language and their culture. Africa is rich in history partly because of the multiplicity of languages and partly because of its diverse range of traditions and cultures. In Ghana, there is a high level of linguistic heterogeneity which places the country in a very unique position. In fact, there is currently no specific figure on the number of languages spoken in the country. This is partly because some of these languages have not yet been codified. The number of languages spoken in the country range between fifty (50) to sixty (60) (Dakubu,1996; Grimes, 1984). However, Eberhard et al. (2022) recently estimate that, there are about 83 established languages in Ghana out of which 73 are indigenous and 10 are non-indigenous. The continuous change in the exact number of languages in Ghana, points to the fact that there may be more languages spoken in Ghana that may not have been considered in the list of recognised languages.

Despite the many languages spoken in the country, there are mainly twelve (12) languages that have been officially codified and accepted as medium of instruction in the first six years of basic education in the country. These Ghanaian languages, according to the Bureau of Ghana Languages (2022), include Akuapem Twi, Asante Twi, Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangme, Ewe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem (Kassena), Kusaal (Kusal), Mfantse and Nzema. The 12 Ghanaian languages which are also known as Government-sponsored languages are sometimes used to disseminate information where necessary. Currently, as confirmed by Adika (2012), more Ghanaian languages are being used alongside English, for broadcast purposes because numerous radio stations do allow callers to decide to speak in the local/indigenous languages of their choice during phone-in programmes.

Furthermore, the pidgin language which is mostly spoken among the youth in some selected communities and schools has most recently been codified and is being used in international media such as BBC and some local radio and TV stations. The Ghanaian Pidgin which became a common language among Ghanaians in secondary school dormitories, university campus, military and police barracks, in the prisons, etc., since the mid-1960s, is used in a variety of social domains, and competes favourably with the indigenous Ghanaian languages (Adika, 2012; Obeng, 1997) and standard English, even though it has a limited vocabulary. Additionally, Ghana's national language policy prioritises the use of English as a medium of communication across the country. For instance, it is the language used by the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary. The choice of English as a national language in multilingual countries especially in Africa, according to Paran and Williams (2007: 3), was "to promote modernisation through industrial development, tourism and international commerce". An overriding concern is how to unite everyone in the country especially at the level of civil administration, thus, making these countries "to favour English, with the primary school seen as a crucial instrument that would achieve this" (Paran and Williams, 2007: 3). This policy is no different from the Language-in-education policies adopted over the years in Ghana, since the pre-independence era. There have been times in history when indigenous Ghanaian languages have been preferred to be used to as a medium of instruction and in other times, when the official language; which is English, has been prioritised. These Language-in-Education policies are summarised by Tom-Lawyer and Thomas (2020) in the Table 1 below.

Literacy and language choice in learning environments are key elements of sustainable development. Kaplan (2021) suggests that a language policy should have two fundamental objectives:

i maximize the ability of a population to acquire knowledge so as to increase education levels and productivity;

ii maximize the cohesion of a population so as to increase its ability to cooperate to promote national development.

These aims underscore language as the medium through which humans interact and communicate their desires, ideas, emotions and thoughts to one another. These interactions come in the form of verbal and non-verbal communication. The verbal form of language encompasses the utilisation of sounds and symbols in expressions, while the non-verbal language incorporates the use of signs and body language such as gestures and facial expressions. In the words of Nwadike (2004), language is the gateway to people's hearts, therefore, if this gateway is lost, the society loses its people. Ezeh and Udaba (2020) also emphasised that language plays a role in creating, stating,

Table 1. The Language-in-Education Policies in Ghana

Year	Language-in-Education Policies
1925-1957	Ghanaian language was used as a means of instruction in the first three years.
1957-1966	English only policy.
1967-1969	Ghanaian language used only in primary school.
1970-1973	Ghanaian language was used in the first four years of primary school.
1974-2002 (Sept)	Ghanaian language was used in the first three years of primary school.
2002-2006	English only policy.
2008 till date	Ghanaian language is used in the first three years of primary school.

Source: adapted from Tom-Lawyer and Thomas (2020)

interpreting, understanding, executing, and evaluating all the SDGs. Nwadike (2004) established that developing a sustainable society and people are achieved through language. It is therefore important to place emphasis on the roles that language plays in the society and in the development of a population.

The Sapir-Whorfian theory of language (1938) has established that a speaker's viewpoint is in relation to his spoken language. This implies that a person's opinion, thoughts and language are shaped by his or her interactions with his socio-cultural environment. This led Ezeh and Udaba (2020) to conclude that there is a fixed inter-relationship bond between language and culture, as well as, the relationship between culture and the environment. Thus, to achieve effective sustainable developmental goals, there is a need for intercultural education, most importantly in the area of educating and interpreting the goals through language. Djite (2008) further added that development can only be achieved with reference to language as a significant component whereas real development is not achievable in the world without the inclusion of local languages and the full involvement and participation of all human asset. Leech (1981: 30) explained that "some kinds of language have a referential function (e.g. newspaper reports); whiles others have a directive or persuasive function (e.g. advertising); some also have an emotive function or a social function (e.g. casual conversation)". Each of language's functions can be exploited to achieve the attainment of the 17 SDGs. Leech (1981) further emphasised that language influences how individuals think, therefore, without communicating through a language, the idea of sustainable development cannot be conceived in the minds of people. Scholars such as Zygmunt (2016) and Toppo and Rahman, (2020) have reported that language helps people to understand and assimilate ideas and information. In relation to which language one has to be educated in, every human being through the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (1998), has the right to education in their own language. This is explicitly stated in Articles 26 to 28 as follow (1988: 27):

Article 26

All language communities are entitled to an education which will enable their members to acquire a full command of their own language, including the different abilities relating to all the usual spheres of use, as well as the most extensive possible command of any other language they may wish to know. All language communities are entitled to an education which will enable their members to acquire knowledge of any languages related to their own cultural tradition, such as literary or sacred languages which were formerly habitual languages of the community. All language communities are entitled to an education which will enable their members to acquire a thorough knowledge of their cultural heritage (history, geography, literature, and other manifestations of their own culture), as well as the most extensive possible knowledge of any other culture they may wish to know.

This adoption and dominance therefore, of the English language in many African countries including Ghana, where the languages of international benefits such as English, Portuguese or French are most dominant in schools, cause students to consciously and unconsciously ignore their mother tongue (MT) and other regional languages. This creates language imbalance among learners and mostly attributes to low-quality education. It is also an infringement on the Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) as the LHR of the learners is routinely ignored and violated in Ghanaian schools (Owu-Ewie, 2017). The 17 SDGs cannot be effectively achieved if importance is not placed on the role of language in policy development and implementation by people in socio-cultural setting. According to Zygmunt (2016), in the accomplishment of the SDGs, the role of language is inevitable. At the UN symposium on Language and the SDGs in 2015, it was observed that linguistic constraints could potentially be a challenge in achieving the SDGs. Rabiah (2012) further added to the importance of language that it is first a means of

communication and communication always takes place within a social context. Language points towards both the individual characteristics of a person as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her community. In such instances, the language used in the community cannot be separated from the culture in the same community since language has a close relation with the attitude or behaviour of its speakers (Rabiah, 2018). Gudykunst (1997) explains that "the culture in which individuals are socialised influences the way they communicate and the way individuals communicate can change the culture they share over time". In other words, the language used by people influences their culture, and the culture of a people also influences its language.

Language and culture are inextricably linked. In fact, language constitutes the foundation of every culture. This is largely because it is the fundamental tool for oral literature and for the dissemination of knowledge and ideas (Nwadike, 2004). Culture on the other hand forms the identity of any group of people. It permeates every part of the society and forms the blood line of every community (UCLG, 2018). According to Pullen (2015), differences in understanding and knowledge, which also lead to differences in culture, can be addressed through linguistic negotiation and communication. Therefore, for any sustainable development to take place, there needs to be a means by which individuals, diverse communities or even nations can fully contribute to the different plans in order to achieve positive outcomes. Language brings together people and permits the exchange of ideas on a global podium to work together for the good of all. The foregoing discussion highlights the issue of the role of language in maintaining culture and creating sustainable development in Ghana. Firstly, language is fundamentally a means of communication. As a medium of communication, it becomes a channel through which culture is transmitted from one generation to another (Ezeh and Udaba, 2020; Toppo and Rahman, 2020; Zygmunt, 2016). Oral literature for example, is the oldest channel for cultural transmission. This medium existed before most of the local languages were codified. Without the existence of oral literature, society would have lost the core tenets of its culture. Grzywacz (2013) observes that "a learner or user of languages is connected in time and space to cultural tradition which is considered as a significant process connected with the unique form of access to other traditions". This assertion by Grzywacz (2013) seems to suggest that fundamentally, languages link different cultures and traditions together and as a result, forms a significant part of national development. Ghana has for many years struggled in this regard to develop a national language policy. This struggle has hampered the development of local languages on the international stage. Currently, none of the local languages has attained the status of an international language partly because of the multiplicity of languages in the country and partly because of the tribal race for supremacy in the country as no ethnic group wants its language wants to appear to have been behind.

The ongoing competition for tribal dominance has made it increasingly difficult to put in place a language policy that ensures that the Ghana develops a national language which has the potential to become an international language. Nevertheless, Ghana has made great strides in developing twelve (12) major local languages for use in schools as medium of instruction. Even though this is a great step, it has also hampered the development of some minority languages in especially the northern part of the country. For example, Eberhard et al. (2022) classify languages such Chakali, Chala, Kantosi; found in the Northern sector of Ghana, as languages which are threatened, while languages such as Anufo, Birifor, Buli, Hanga, Kamara, Wali, etc. are classified as developing. The southern sector of Ghana is not left out of this phenomenon. Akpanglo-Nartey et al. (2012) cites Ga-Adangme and Awutu-Efutu as languages which are also endangered. These are examples of minority languages which may go extinct if nothing is done about developing a system to code them. The culture and identity of the speakers of these languages, are gradually losing their significance since the Language-in education policy of Ghana promotes the use of the 12 government sponsored languages in the classrooms and on national radio and TV stations. In order to ensure that people do not lose their culture and tradition, steps such as keeping "adequate linguistic records of the smaller languages of Ghana" (Akpanglo-Nartey et al. 2012) must be taken to enhance the development of these minority languages. These steps, when taken, would greatly enhance the sustainability and the development of the culture and traditions of the speakers of the languages mentioned above.

2.1 The role of culture in sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda commits the global community to "achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions, economic, social and environmental development in a balanced and integrated manner" (UN ESCAP, 2015: 6). The social dimension focuses on equality of opportunities for people, including welfare, quality of life and sustainable human development, while the economic dimension entails efficient economic and technological activities, fostering investment and productivity, economic growth, and economic output of society. The environmental dimension, on the other hand, includes the utilisation of the natural environment and its resources without causing any degradation it thereby ensuring the safe use of the environment. Culture is classified under social dimension of sustainable development agenda. The cultural aspects of the social dimension include cultural rights, cultural heritage, cultural diversity and cultural creativity and these are core com-

ponents of human and sustainable development (UCLG, 2018). Synthesising knowledge from over 300 publications, Zheng et al (2021) conclude that cultural features are associated with the successful realisation of all 17 SDGs and 79% of the SDG targets, and that the relevance of culture towards achieving sustainable development varies depending on different interpretations of culture, varying from both tangible and intangible achievements of human beings to symbolic patterns, norms and rules of individual human communities. The National Commission on Culture's document on Ghana's Cultural Policy (2004) defines culture as the entire way of life which people have developed through experience and reflection in order to shape a balanced co-existence with the environment. This implies that culture takes place in a dynamic way and gives order and meaning to the economic, political, social, religious and aesthetic activities of people by giving them a distinct identity. For instance, Hosagrahar et al. (2016) argue that cultural heritage plays an important factor in the sustainable development of both urban and rural communities across the globe. Similarly, other studies (e.g. Nocca, 2017; Nwadike, 2004) indicate that culture has influence and plays various roles in all the 17 SDGs and 169 target goals.

Culture plays an important role in the conservation of genetic resources. The 17 SDGs seek to preserve existing genetic resources in the environment, including the genetic distribution, knowledge, and sharing of seeds. It should be noted that cultural practices in communities across the world ensure continuous preservation of our natural resources (Nocca, 2017; UN SDG Summit 2019). Most cultures in the world for decades protect and ensure the continuous conservation of natural resources and natural bodies such as water bodies and aquatic ecosystems, mountains, forests, wetlands, aquifers, game reserves, and natural monuments through tourism through traditional values, norms, taboos, totem and beliefs. For instance, in Ghana some cultural and traditional practices prohibit fishing the in ocean on specific days: for example, Tuesdays in the coastal districts of the Western Region; and seasons such as the closed seasons in the year. These practices relate to the sustainable preservation of marine and coastal ecosystems. In addition, tangible and intangible cultural heritage enhance the promotion of sustainable development to the extent that it produces not only economic impacts but contributes to communal and societal well-being.

Having observed the role of socio-cultural heritage in realising the social dimension of sustainability, scholars such as Anderson et al. (2015) and Pretty et al. (2009) have argued that biocultural heritage should be considered as a conceptual icon that should be formulated as a vital element of any sustainability agenda. This argument is re-enforced by the UN's 2030 sustainable development agenda which places emphasis on the economic and environmental dimensions of development whiles neglecting the social dimension from which culture is born. Human beings, through social interactions, create culture which is the basis for sustainable social development. To achieve sustainable economic and environmental development goals, the culture which influences people's way of life, beliefs and perceptions of the environment should not be underestimated by sustainable development policies as threats to cultural diversity and alternative forms of economies will remain a missing link in the ongoing discourse on sustainable development. Such an argument proposes to ultimately highlight the continuing need for a revised Sustainable Development Goal that will seek to redress the situation to safeguard, promote and harness biocultural heritage in order to strengthen and support the sustainable interactions among the various human societies and their unique environments. To sum it up, when culture becomes an integral part of sustainable development, according to Nordic Culture Point's report (n.d.: 7), "it brings to society fundamental qualities . . . such as creativity, critical thinking, empathy, trust, mutual respect and a willingness to take risk".

3. The place of language and cultural sustainability in Ghana's sustainable development agenda

Since Ghana boast of cultural and language diversity, in order to achieve the SDGs and the national sustainable development agenda, languages and diverse culture should be promoted and protected. This subsection discusses the role language and culture can play to help Ghana attain the sustainable agenda by 2030. The Agenda 2030 which focuses on achieving sustainable development by member countries calls on governments to be responsible for the development of their own countries. It cuts across all 17 SDGs and is structured around five themes, namely; People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership (the five Ps). These themes integrate into each other and cannot be considered as standalone goals to be achieved. Ghana's overall goal for achieving the SDGs is to create opportunities for all Ghanaians, preserve the natural environment and ensure a resilient built environment while maintaining a stable, united and secure country. These three priorities reflect the three pillars of sustainable development - Economic, Social and Environmental - to which a fourth pillar - Institutional - has been added in the Ghanaian context. (see, Ghana: Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019). In its quest to attain the SDGs, Ghana has come up with 16 flagship programmes as presented in the Table 2 below.

Ghana, in taking steps to achieve the SDGs, came up with 16 flagship programmes. Despite several interventions to achieve these sustainable goals, Ghana and many

Table 2. Ghana's 16 sustainable development agenda programmes

	Agenda	Aim(s)
1.	Digitising Ghana	• National Identification System as the primary identifier, with linkages to the databases of institutions; • National Digital Addressing System • Port Automation System; • Electronic payments system
2.	Planting for Food and Jobs	• To stimulate food production and generate incomes
3.	One Village, One Dam	• Initiative to ensure year-round farming, especially in the Northern part of Ghana
4.	One district, one factory	• Initiative, to establish at least one industrial enterprise in each district of Ghana
5.	Free Senior High School (SHS)	• Free senior high education for all Ghanaian children
6.	A quota system	• To get women in 30 percent of public appointments
7.	A policy of reserving 30 percent of poverty alleviation/credit funds of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs)	• to support women's enterprises
8.	The Office of the Special Prosecutor	• to investigate and prosecute certain categories of cases and allegations of corruption
9.	Passing the Right to Information Bill	• to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms
10.	Establishing the Fiscal Stability Council	
11.	Establishing the Nation Builders Corp (NABCO);	• to reduce graduate unemployment
12.	Establishing the Integrated Aluminium Development Corporation	
13.	Passing the Affirmative Action Bill	• to increase women's involvement in decision making at all levels
14.	Establishing the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme	
15.	Infrastructure for Poverty Eradication Programme (IPEP)	
16.	Creation of Special Development Authorities and Zongo Development Fund	

SOURCE: (Ghana: Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019, p19).

other Sub-Saharan African countries may not achieve their Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) targets because of increased debt which is projected to be more than 50% of the Gross Domestic Product (Somanje et al., 2020). Moreover, language and culture are necessary in attaining all the 16 flagship programmes.

From the Table 2, Ghana's flagstaff policies aligned with the SDGs such as "One district, one factory" initiative, to establish at least one industrial enterprise in each district of Ghana (SDG 4), Planting for Food and Jobs" (SDG 2) and Free Senior High School (SHS) (SDG 4) can be classified under the social pillar which depends on the people and the society in which they live. In the sub-sections below, the roles which language and culture play in promoting the 5 selected SDGs are explored.

Table 3. Some selected Ghana Government's Interventions that are in line with the 17 SDGs

S/N.	SDG	Agenda	Examples of selected Government Interventions
1.	SDG 1	No Poverty	• Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP); • National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS); • Implementation of Capitation Grant;
2.	SDG 2	Zero Hunger	• Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN); • Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ); • Promoting the production and utilisation of locally grown and nutrient-rich food; • One village, one dam (1V1D);
3.	SDG 3	Good Health and Well-being	• Free primary healthcare services for pregnant women; • Enhancing access to CHPS compound in deprived areas; • Training of health workers including midwives in safe motherhood skills, abortion care, lactation management, and Jadelle insertion and removal; • Upgrading of existing health facilities and construction of new health infrastructure
4.	SDG 4	Quality Education	• Implementation of Free Senior High School Policy; • Equity policy to ensure 30% of students from public Junior High Schools have access to the top 55 Senior High Schools • Introduction of a new curriculum with the focus on reading, writing, arithmetic and creativity (4Rs); • Provision of core textbooks to students in public senior high schools;
5.	SDG 16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	• Enhancement of police-public relations • Justice for All Programme

Ghana's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Ghana's 2019 VNR Report)

3.1 SDG 1 and 2: No Poverty and Zero Hunger

To be able to achieve both SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by 2030, Ghana has adopted interventions such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP); Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ), Promoting the production and utilisation of locally grown and nutrient-rich food, and the One Village, One dam (1V1D) initiatives, which are to provide solutions for reducing poverty, achieving food security, and ultimately ending hunger in the country. These interventions have one thing in common: Food. To retain cultural identity, people from different cultural backgrounds, often use food patterns to connect to their cultural or ethnic group (Sibal, 2018). What is eaten, how frequent people eat, the quantity that is eaten, with whom they eat, etc, are influenced in part, by culture (Spencer-Oatey, and Franklin, 2012). Food security is of great concern to the UN. According to a report by the World Vision (n.d), when food is not enough, adults struggle to work and children are unable to learn, resulting in severe challenges to sustainable, long-term economic and social development. According to the HLPE (2017), some home-grown school feeding (HGSF) programmes exist to provide food in various schools in sub-Saharan African countries, like the Ghana School Feeding programme, (GSFP) which provides "the opportunity to ensure that children in school get at least one healthy meal per day." (HLPE, 2017: 95). These HGSF programmes ensure children learn without struggle, are retained longer in school and they grow into healthy adults. These local meals are prepared using local recipes with ingredients from locally cultivated crops. This also helps in promoting the culture of the people living in the community since the kind of food eaten by a people depends sometimes on where their ancestors originated from, or on the staple food ingredient

grown in the areas where they live, as well as "provide opportunities for supporting local farmers" (HLPE, 2017: 95). Apart from financially empowering farmers when their food crops are used to cook thanks to the HGSF, the culture of the community is also promoted as these interventions depend on the culture of the individuals in each community.

3.2 SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

As indicated in Table 3 above, Ghana aims at improving healthcare in order to attain the SDG 3. A lot of efforts are therefore being made to get all communities in the country to have access to good healthcare. Improving healthcare can best be achieved using language. Communicating information on health-related issues to people in the language they use, is of great importance. Health communication is seen to have relevance for virtually every aspect of health and well-being, including disease prevention, health promotion and quality of life (Rimal and Lapinski, 2009: 247). In Ghana, however, most medical staff; during training, are not exposed to the study of Ghanaian languages. This is because Ghana's "Ministry of Health has no clear policy on language use in healthcare delivery. Health workers in the country are trained in English. In recent times, however, the Nursing and Midwifery Council has introduced French and sign language in the curriculum of nursing and midwifery training colleges to aid service delivery" (Amfo, n.d).

This makes it challenging for medical staff to communicate in the Ghanaian languages spoken in the communities in which they serve. Djite (2021: 95) argues that "patients ought to be able to receive healthcare without the added stress of dealing with medical doctors speaking in foreign tongues". This confirms Parrott's position that "the availability of health information provides an important avenue to manage physical and mental health"

(Parrott, 2004: 766). Removing language barriers in healthcare has a lot of benefits to offer as "evidence indicates that it increases access to healthcare, promotes higher quality and safe care, improves patient satisfaction, enhances appropriate utilisation of healthcare resources, and increases preventive health activities (Osae-Larbi, 2016: 2). According to Dowbor et al. (2015: 2), language interpretation services to aid health care patients who are not proficient in a country's official language(s) are essential to improve health equity across diverse populations." Osae-Larbi (2016: 2) asserts that "the use of professional interpreters may improve disclosure in patient-provider communications, referral to specialty care, and patient satisfaction". When there is a language barrier in the absence of a trained interpreter, most of these health workers depend on untrained interpreters, use a "broken" version of the Ghanaian or English languages or sometimes gestures and unconventional sign language to communicate. The use of these untrained interpreters usually becomes a source of worry as there could be errors and distortions in interpreting what patients say or breaches of confidentiality (Flores, 2005; Bauer and Alegria, 2010; Dowbor et al., 2015; Osae-Larbi, 2016). This challenge is best solved with the training and hiring of more professional interpreters even though it comes at a cost or by inculcating the study Ghanaian languages in every academic programme on the academic ladder.

3.3 SDG 4: Quality Education
The UN's SDG 4's 7th target says: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development". While Ghana has succeeded in providing access to education for the greater majority of children, the quality of education is lagging behind. (Ghana's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 53).

Language, literacy and development are interrelated. That is why when the Ghana Statistical Service's (2021: 35) report on the Ghana 2021 Population and Housing Census indicated that "literacy rate among population 6 years and older in nine out of the 16 regions is below the national figure (69.8%), with Greater Accra Region (87.9%) recording the highest and Savannah Region (32.8%) the lowest", there was a cause for worry. The report further reveals that there is, out of Ghana's total population of 30,832,019 in 2021, one in every five persons (20.8%) aged 3 years and older who has never attended school. Paran and Williams (2007: 1) hold the belief that "investment in literacy would have a positive effect in developing countries". It is for this reason that the Free

SHS policy was introduced in 2018 with the intention of increasing literacy levels in Ghana, thereby giving most Ghanaians the ability to develop a human capital for all sectors of the economy: primary, secondary and tertiary. Djite (2021: 95) supports Paran and Williams (2007) by arguing that "no country in the world has been able to lift its people out of poverty through illiteracy (i.e. inability to read and write)". Djite (2021) further indicates that it is sad to note that 60 years later (after gaining independence), most of the African people, including Ghanaians, are functionally illiterate in the borrowed national/official language imposed upon them. This violation of the LHR through the imposition of other languages, has "forced some children to drop out of school, has alienated Ghanaian children from their heritage/indigenous languages and identity, and has forcibly transferred Ghanaian children to another linguistic/cultural group" (Owu-Ewie, 2017: 167).

Literacy is also a very important tool for preserving ethnic cultures. Williams (1998) is of the view that competence in the mother tongue does not impede the learning of the second language, and thus, advocates for in integration of mother tongue-based multilingual education especially in the early years. The promotion of just 12 Ghanaian languages out of the numerous languages in Ghana is contrary to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana which indicates "the State shall foster the development of Ghanaian languages and pride in Ghanaian culture" (Ghana's Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 1996, 1996: 38). This is in line with Djite (2008)'s arguments in favour of language awareness as a key component for attaining sustainable development. Studies by Yang (2020) and Mkwinda-Nyasulu (2013), show that, for a country to develop, it needs to focus on the promotion of its language and culture. However, Djite (1993: 149) argues that development "is not possible in Africa without the integration of national languages and the full and intelligent participation of all the forces of the continent". The question at this stage is "can Ghana attain the SDGs if most national languages are not being developed and promoted?" As discussed earlier, language and culture have major roles to play in the sustainability agenda of every country. Unlike most monolingual countries in Europe and states in America where the language used at home is the same language used as the medium of communication in school, at the work place, and in the media, Ghana and other African countries have the challenge of having a different language as Language 1 (L1) while using English, French, Portuguese as the national language through which most information are disseminated. When people are educated in foreign languages as is usually the case in African countries, the culture of the people gets lost in the process. Nevertheless, learning foreign languages such as English, French and Chinese languages, opens Ghana's doors to the international community.

Language and education are two interrelated concepts which cannot be divorced because educational information is disseminated through language and language endures and thrives through education (Owu-Ewie, 2017: 152). It is in this light that literacy teaching in a language already known to the learners, typically their mother tongue, is more likely to succeed than teaching in a language children meet for the first time as they enter the classroom" (Paran and Williams, 2007: 3). UNESCO (2007: 5) affirms that programmes in mother tongue are more effective than those in the official language, which remain the norm around the world. This assertion is as a result of other studies carried out by UNESCO (2007: 159) indicating that:

i *"Bilingual learning environments tend to be more comfortable for children than monolingual settings. Evidence from Bolivia, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and the Niger shows that parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning when local languages are used (Benson, 2002).*

ii *Mother tongue instruction is also important for promoting gender equality and social inclusion. Girls in some societies are much less likely than boys to be exposed to the official language, as they spend more time at home and with family members. Girls who are taught in their mother tongue tend to stay in school longer, perform better on achievement tests and repeat grades less than girls who do not (UNESCO Bangkok, 2005).*

iii *Multilingual education also benefits other disadvantaged groups, including children from rural communities (Hovens, 2002)".*

Despite the "positive effects of using the child's L1 as medium of instruction in education, many multilingual countries in Africa, including Ghana, use a language of education which is not the L1 of the child" (Owu-Ewie, 2017: 152). Ghana stands to gain more if the language-in-education policy is changed to be in favour of the indigenous languages making more Ghanaian children to develop their creativity and understanding when they think and interact in their mother tongues as can be seen in the Asian, European and American countries/states. This high human capital development would translate into reducing the poverty level in Ghana and increasing employability skills of Ghanaians. The Ghana Statistical Service (2021) confirms that "about half (48.0%) of the literate population aged 6 years and older can read and write in one language, 45.6% in two languages, with English and Ghanaian language being the dominant languages, 5.2% in three languages and 0.1% speak more than three languages." It should be noted that the literate population in reference here is 69.8% of the total Ghanaian population.

Table 4. Statistics of Ghanaians who can read and write in one language (48.0%) of the literate population

One language	
English only	44.70%
Ghanaian language only	2.70%
French	0.30%
Arabic only	0.20%
Other language	0.10%
Total	**48.00%**

Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2022)

Table 5. Statistics of Ghanaians who can read and write in two languages (45.6%) of the literate population

Two languages	
English and a Ghanaian language	43.70%
English and French	0.50%
English and Arabic	0.60%
Ghanaian language and French	0.10%
Ghanaian language and Arabic	0.00%
Two Ghanaian languages	0.10%
French and Arabic	0.00%
Other pairs of languages	0.60%
Total	**45.60%**

Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2022)

From Table 4a, b, and c, majority of the literate population can read and write in English while a minority of 2.7% can read and write in one Ghanaian language (Table 4a). There is no one in Ghana who can read and write more than three languages (Table 4c). These statistics have major effects on how Ghana is able to achieve these SDGs by 2030.

The Food and Drugs Authority of Ghana has a document on the Requirements for Labelling of Products (2013, p. 3) which states that if "the original label is in a local or foreign language, the product information shall be in English or a translation thereof." Researchers have observed that, labelling of products is rather made in English as Ghana is a multilingual country. For instance, information on how to apply farm inputs such as weedicides etc. is labelled in English, and when farmers who are not able to read English buy these products, they tend to rely on secondary information from interpreters to enable them apply the inputs, instead of the primary information from the manufacturer. The argument is that it is not everyone in Ghana who is able to read documents written in any of the 12-government sponsored Ghanaian languages, probably due to the influence of both the national language policy and language-in-education policy.

Table 6. Statistics of speakers of two languages in Ghana (45.6%) of the literate population

Three languages	
English and two Ghanaian languages	3.20%
English, Ghanaian language and French	1.10%
English, Ghanaian language and Arabic	0.40%
Ghanaian language, French and Arabic	0.00%
Two Ghanaian languages and French	0.00%
Two Ghanaian languages and Arabic	0.00%
Other three languages	0.40%
Total	**45.60%**

Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2022)

Djite (2021: 95) is of the view that "it is high time for a paradigm shift that focuses on the priorities of this part of the world, because farmers in sub-Saharan Africa ought to know how to read the instructions written on a bag of fertilizer." In the quest to attain quality education by 2030 across Ghana, there is also the need to introduce various pedagogical approaches of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the classroom.

3.4 SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

One of the reasons for forming the UN in 1945 was "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and these words are found in the preamble of the UN Charter. The founders, after witnessing the devastating effects of two world wars, which were as a result "of the most radical attacks against the dignity of human beings, when violent, racist and antisemitic doctrines were taught in schools, legitimized by pseudo-science and fuelled by systematic propaganda, using the modern tools of culture, communication and information". Despite these efforts by the UN, there are still conflicts in parts of world, with terrorism threatening the peace and freedom in countries. According to the UN, even though the absolute number of deaths have reduced, conflict and violence are on the rise with the principal actors of these conflicts and violence being political militias, criminal, and international terrorist groups, as a result of "unresolved regional tensions, a breakdown in the rule of law, absent or co-opted state institutions, illicit economic gain, and the scarcity of resources exacerbated by climate change, have become dominant drivers of conflict" (United Nations, n.d.).

Shared culture brings people together in many ways and serves as a bridge to bring peace between communities or countries. It is of no surprise that the SDG 16 is associated with of peace, justice and strong institutions. Ghana has enjoyed a degree of relative peace as compared to her neighbours within the sub-Saharan region. This however does not mean the peace of the nation has not been threatened on few occasions. Ghana is less prone to conflict and violence but there are reports of attacks from time to time resulting from ethnic, religious, community, district and regional identities (Kerswill and Mahama, 2019; Tsikata and Seini, 2004). Tsikata and Seini (2004) go on to identify different categories of continuous conflict in Ghana in the 1990s to include:

i Inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic disputes centred on control over land and other resources and sovereignty issue such as chieftaincy succession,

ii Religious conflicts between Muslims, between Christians and Muslims, and between Christians and followers of traditional religious practices,

iii Police-community violence as a result of policing and law and order issues arising from communal conflicts and inter-personal disputes

iv Political violence between members of different political parties and

v Football violence between supporters of rival football clubs.

To achieve a lasting peace and security everywhere in the world including Ghana, there is the need to harness the power of education, science and culture to bring out the best in humanity, foster mutual understanding and respect for human rights. The vital tool, which will facilitate this, is dialogue, which depends on language and culture, as confirmed by Kerswill and Mahama (2019: 343), the "use of language can also help heal old wounds". Gyamfi (2009) notes that the use of confrontational or unclear language which could lead to the escalation of conflicts, should be avoided during dispute resolutions, and that parties involved should use language to give an opportunity for peaceful settlement of the disputes leaving no room for misinterpretation. Even though Kerswill and Mahama (2019) have argued that language is not a significant direct cause of conflict but it implicated in conflicts because it is a powerful marker of social and ethnic group, they suggest that to reduce the chance of conflict and promote development, there is the need to be mindful of the choice of language while not forgetting minority languages.

Ghana, in the hope of attaining SGD 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), aims at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Ghana chose the following targets, among others; *Enhancement of police-public relations, Justice for All Programme, Establishment of child protection clubs in schools.* Ghana's 1992 constitution spells out ways in which language can be used to bring peace and justice to its citizens. In reference to the use of language, the 1992 constitution indicates the following:

i Protection of Personal Liberty in Ghana: "A person who is arrested, restricted or detained shall be informed immediately, in a language that he understands, of the reasons for his arrest, restriction or detention and of his right to a lawyer of his choice." (Ghana's Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 1996, p. 21)

ii Fair Trial: "A person charged with a criminal offence shall . . .

d. be informed immediately in a language that he understands, and in detail, of the nature of the offence charged, . . .

h. be permitted to have, without payment by him, the assistance of an interpreter where he cannot understand the language used at the trial;"
(Ghana's Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 1996: 24)

This is laudable as it grants everyone an opportunity, especially the 20.8% of the population which has never been to school, to have access to justice. However, Amfo (n.d) bemoans that the judiciary "lacks standard interpretation services for citizens who cannot speak nor understand English as used in the court. In cases where interpreters exist, they lack training and regulation". This is a source of worry since this situation impedes making enough strides in the Justice for All Programme, as "the population at large ought to be able to make statements at police stations and defend themselves in the courts of law in a language they understand" (Djite, 2021: 95). Ghana's drive for digitisation has seen a lot of improvement in the telecommunication sector. When one calls the Helplines, an opportunity to be addressed in a Ghanaian language of one's choice is available. This shows a gradual integration of Ghanaian languages in that sector. However, more needs to be done, if Ghana wants to accelerate the ultimate attainment of the SDG 9 faster. Again, it is laudable that the technological giant Google, has taken steps to include Ghanaian languages such as Akan, Ewe and Ga as part of the languages on their Google search engine.

The availability and use of information and data is a component of the efforts required towards achieving sustainable development (Ghana's 2019 VNR Report, p. 73). The Right to Information (RTI) bill which was passed into law on 26th March, 2019, and became effective in January 2020, aligns with the SDG 16 that seeks to "promote peaceful, inclusive societies for sustainable development; provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." It also puts Ghana on the path of taking steps towards the attainment of the SDGs by 2030. This bill enactment grants to Ghanaians the right to access any information

they need. This law is expected to empower Ghanaians to understand policies in relation to their health, education, trade and infrastructure. This empowerment can be better achieved when the use of indigenous languages is adopted. Apart from translating information on the policies Ghana has put in place for the attainment of the SDGs, there is also the need to help Ghanaians with special needs to also access the vital information. This could be done by training more people to communicate in Sign language as well as get this information through the braille system so that no one is left out.

4. Conclusion

The world is on the path of safeguarding the earth's natural resources in order to meet the needs of both the present and future generations through the promotion of cultural heritage, human dignity and freedom, reduction in poverty, among others and Ghana cannot afford to be left behind. This paper therefore explores the importance of language and culture in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the various interventions adopted by Ghana. Even though sustainable development widely covers the economic, environmental and social spheres, more attention appears to be paid only to environmental and economic growth while the socio-cultural domain; which houses culture and language is neglected. This is why, to achieve most of the 17 SDGs, create opportunities for all, safeguard the natural environment and ensure a resiliently-built-environment while maintaining a stable, united and safe country, there is the need to equally focus on the socio-cultural matters, such the use of language and culture, by people to communicate issues related to the achievement of the SDGs. In working towards the attainment of the 17 SDGs, Ghana settled on 16 flagship programmes. With focus on 5 SDGs namely: SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), Key findings of this research include:

i culture has an influence in the achievement of various SDGs,

ii language is a tool to drive home the need for the inclusion of everyone to contribute his or her quota towards engaging in sustainable practices which will make the world worth handing over to the future generations.

iii Language and culture are catalysts towards improving and maintaining good health among Ghanaians.

Language and culture serve as engines for sustainable development in Ghana and in any other country seeking to achieve the SDGs by the year 2030. Language and culture contribute to improving food security in Ghana,

improved economic conditions, improved quality health and life span for Ghanaians. An individual's way of thinking, actions, beliefs, values, lifestyles and attitudes are greatly influenced by both their language and culture. The promotion of language and culture, therefore, leads to peace and security in Ghana and in other parts of the world.

There is also a link between culture and environmental sustainability. When people's culture is promoted, it reflects in how they protect their environment. This research recommends that, the Government of Ghana and all stake holders refocus on the drive to promote Cultural Studies in all levels of the academic ladder. The curriculum in these academic institutions should explicitly promote the Ghanaian culture through the course contents and textbooks used in schools across the country. A study of the relationship between the promotion of sustainability and the content of the new curriculum being used in the basic schools in Ghana could be an area for future research. This could provide an assurance that, Ghana is inculcating idea of sustainable national development into the minds of young Ghanaians, who are often described as the future leaders of the country.

As discussed earlier, language and culture are interlinked. The need to code all languages in Ghana is paramount. This would ensure that more Ghanaian languages are written and studied in schools across Ghana. To begin with, students who want to study any of the 12 sponsored Ghanaian languages in the Senior High Schools should be allowed to do so without restrictions. This means, opportunities should be given to more Ghanaian language teachers to teach the language outside their 'home regions'. For instance, in Ashanti Region where Akan is studied in Senior High Schools, opportunity should be given to students who may want to learn other Ghanaian languages such as Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangme, Ewe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem (Kassena), Kusaal (Kusal) or Nzema, to do so, just as similar opportunities are given to students to learn a foreign language like French. It is equally recommended that Sign language should be introduced as a compulsory subject in the basic schools. Ghanaians with hearing impairments would be able to communicate with everyone around them, integrate easily and not feel left out. More teachers would have to be trained to teach this subject in various schools across the country, thereby creating more job opportunities for Ghanaians to improve their economic status. The idea of sustainable development may not be properly conceived in the minds of people to help achieve Ghana's agenda of the 17 SDGs, if these agenda are not linked to the culture of Ghanaians and not well communicated through the languages used and understood by them. It is recommended, therefore that, Ghanaian policy-makers place some premium on language use and the preservation of diverse cultural heritages through communicating and

adopting interventions aimed at attaining Ghana's sustainable development agenda. In conclusion, language and culture have a great influence on numerous aspects of sustainable development, hence can serve as a framework towards fast-track achievement of various SDGs.

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