

Partnership in indigenous language documentation and advocacy: Experience from the Abureni Language Project

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Abstract

Members of speech communities thrive to ensure that their indigenous languages and cultures are preserved through various means and methods. The expectations over the linguistic categories in terms of content and quality, demand on cost-time-resources, spread of front-end input and acceptability of deliverables by native speakers themselves, are critical factors that influence the successful delivery of an indigenous language project. The above concerns are significant and become overwhelming, especially for small-groups and endangered languages with little or no previous scientifically based linguistic research publications such as Abureni in Nigeria. On one hand the objective of documenting the aspects of indigenous languages is to preserve their cultural heritage and identity as a people. On another hand, native people have ventured into the documentation and advocacy of their languages so as not to be left behind in the current wave of globalization that impacts all facets of human life. This paper utilizes Grice's theories of conversation and meaning and seeks to highlight the place of partnership and stakeholder involvement in achieving success in indigenous language documentation and advocacy. The authors adopt the functional framework to analyze the tasks, processes, deliverables, challenges, and learnings so far recorded in the Abureni Language project from a participatory perspective. The paper concludes that partnership with both internal and external stakeholders and a sustained involvement from them are enablers in delivering an indigenous language documentation and advocacy project.

Keywords: Indigenous language, partnership, stakeholder-involvement, native speakers, language documentation.

1. Introduction

Abureni Language is classified under Benue-Congo, Cross River, Delta Cross, Central Delta family (Faraclas 1989; Williamson 1989; Hansford, Bendor-Samuel and Stanford 1976; Ndimele, Kari and Ayuwo 2009). Also, Udoh and Okon (2008) list Abureni and Kugbo in the political classification and linguistic affiliations in Bayelsa and Rivers States, and in Central Delta Group. In terms of size and vitality, the combined user population of the two speech communities was reported to be 12,300 in 2016 (Eberhard et al 2021 in Ethnologue 2021; Joshua Project 2021).

The people of Abureni live in the central part of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria in West Africa. For administrative reasons, The Federal Government of Nigeria located the communities and the satellite settlements that makeup Abureni in two separate States of Bayelsa and Rivers, in the three Local Government Areas (LAGs) of Abua/Odual, Nembe, and Ogbia (D. Etire, 2015; Daniel, 2017). The geographical locations of the boundary communities are as follows: to the North-West is Amurukeni (4°46'11.23"N 6°25'12.79"E), to the South is Agrisaba (4°35'36.66"N 6°25'14.25"E), to the East is Akani (4°45'56.57"N 6°29'55.28"E), and Opume (4°31'31.23"N 6°20'50.61"E) to the West (Abureni Boundary Communities **Google Earth** December 30, 2019 and April 17, 2021). The ecosystem is rich in biodiversity in terms of fauna and flora species (Robert, 2019).

Oral literature has been the dominant means of communication among Abureni native speakers. It is used as the principal source for the documentation of historical accounts and cultural features of the people. In the absence of previously written literature, historians and linguists have relied on oral tradition to gather information for their research and publications on Abureni (Daniel, 2017; Robert, 2019). To communicate the gravity of the scarcity of written literature on Abureni and the overt reliance on oral tradition by earlier native writers, R. T. Etire (1998, p. viii) notes that 'There is no written record or published work for people (within and outside) to study and as well as appreciate the people's culture, etc.' Similarly, Ndimele et al in Alagoa, Clark and Tamuno (Eds. 2009) observe that there is an unpublished wordlist in Kugbo, but they do not know of any published work in Abureni.

One of the aims of documenting an indigenous language is to preserve the identity and cultural heritage of a people (Himmelman, 2006). Another driving force is the need to move along with the current trend of globalization that impacts all facets of human life and reap its benefits. On both fronts, the expectations are high, considering the nature of the linguistic categories that should be captured in terms of content and quality. The work

content, resources required, the timeframe, project cost, and acceptability of the deliverables are critical factors that influence the success of an indigenous language documentation work. The above-mentioned concerns are significant and become overwhelming for an individual or one group of persons to handle. This is especially so for a small-group of endangered languages with little or no previous scientifically based linguistic documentation, such as Abureni in Nigeria. The study seeks to highlight the place of partnership and stakeholder involvement in the achievement so far recorded on the Abureni Language Documentation and Advocacy Project.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Hitherto, some individual persons and community interest groups such as the Native Teachers Association of Emago Kugbo, had attempted to document certain aspects of the Abureni language (Etire, 1998). The efforts were localized and not sustained due to various factors. The situation implicates the lack of a centrally accepted unit to facilitate the documentation of the language across the speech communities that constitute Abureni. The problem is escalated by various factors. Dialectical differences exist in Abureni, but they are mutually intelligible and do not hinder communication. Another problem is the delineation of the speech communities in separate states and Local LGAs. There are administrative differences that have been introduced by the machinery of the state, where the communities had variously been delineated into separate provincial, state, or LGA arrangements (Etire, 2015). Funding is another issue, requiring need to harness individual efforts and form a ntral support for the language documentation and advocacy work. The above-mentioned challenges have led to the scarcity of documented literature, which informs the need to identify and involve partners and stakeholders in the Abureni language documentation work. That way, the contributions from such involvement would become an integral source of funding the project.

2 Theoretical considerations

Dialects exist in Abureni, which calls for a conscious approach to ensure that relevant linguistic domains from the constituent dialects are captured in the documentation. In the present world of globalization, such an approach would help generate significant data to build a corpus for the language, a sense of belonging, and ownership among members of speech communities. For example, in tackling dialectical issues in Ìgbò studies, Obinaju and Anyanwu (2018) assert that dialectical variations should be seen and treated as assets, which

are quite valuable. Rather, there should be a conscious effort to improve scholarship in the language and its studies.

According to a UNSDG 2003 report, partnership arrangements should involve stakeholders from different sectors, who should bring their own organizational mandates, interests, competencies, and weaknesses to bear together in the execution of a project. To achieve success, they emphasize the need to nurture a working relationship based on trust, mutual respect, open communication, and understanding among the participants. When people use language to coordinate activities they do jointly, they use both linguistic and non-linguistic signals to reach joint commitments on who is participating, in what roles, with what content, and at what time and location (Clark 2004). He further notes that using language is itself a joint activity and requires the same joint commitments by those involved. We observe that the foregoing views play out in the Abureni Language Documentation Project where the stakeholders are required to buy into its vision and make necessary inputs.

This paper utilizes Grice's theories of conversation and meaning. Grice's *maxims of conversation* are a 'set of observations that describe how people communicate when they want to be properly understood by others,' to be informative, truthful, relevant, and clear (Shatz 2016). Several scholars acknowledge the usefulness of each of the maxims in relation to language and communication. Proega (2020) observes that 'Grice's fundamental insight was that conversation is a cooperative activity. To carry on an intelligible conversation, each party must assume that the other is trying to participate in a meaningful way.' On relevance, Jobs (2007) notes the relationship between how what is implied in language contributes to the meaning of what is explicitly said. The manner or transparency maxim evaluates the clarity, understandability, and logical description of documented information (Wilson and Sperber, 1981). Also, they observe that 'The key benefit of Grice's approach is the illustration of facts and constraints in texts, thus showing the semantic consequences for communication quality.'

The reason for this choice of framework is the expectation that the linguistic data being documented from the various sources would be factual, credible, and acceptable to both the native speakers and their target audience or customers. The documentation project involves the process of ownership of various linguistic domains, interest groups, partners and stakeholders who are drawn from within and outside the speech communities. They are expected to perform certain critical roles that have been identified for them, or themselves have volunteered. These roles may differ from one language to another, and from one dialect to another, depending on their geographical locations and the overarching force influencing the language at the time. However, the people still need to use their native language to communicate effectively in the context of their culture. Fintel and Matthewson (2008) aver

that, ‘languages may differ in the discourse effects of their presuppositions, but that speakers of all languages make use of Gricean machinery. Cultural differences may, however, influence the content of the conversational implicatures which arise.’ Despite that, the general expectation is that the linguistic data that make up the documentation outputs, whether in print or electronic media, would be informative, truthful, clear, and relevant.

It is important to emphasize that the deliverables ought to be relevant, in this case, to the Abureni Language and its sustenance for future generations. According to Wilson and Spencer (1981), ‘The central claim of relevance theory is that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the hearer towards the speaker’s meaning.’ That is what the study aims to achieve, by engendering partnership and stakeholder involvement as enablers to an acceptable indigenous language documentation.

3. Methodology

We adopt the functional framework to provide an account of the impact of partnership and stakeholder involvement on the performance of the Abureni documentation project, from our firsthand knowledge. The Encyclopedia Britannica (1998) defines functionalism, in linguistics, as ‘the approach to language study that is concerned with the functions performed by language, primarily in terms of cognition (relating information), expression (indicating mood), and conation (exerting influence).’ The data gathering and documentation activities undertaken include identifying, analyzing, and evaluating the tasks, processes, deliverables, challenges, corrective actions, and the learnings so far recorded on the project. The primary and secondary data were generated and recorded using face-to-face oral interviews and follow-up review sessions. Recording was a combination of manual and electronic means.

For the fieldwork, the community-based model was adopted in which members of the speech communities were engaged to make their own input, analysis, interpretation, and review of the raw data as native speakers. The Community-Based Language Research model ‘allows for the production of knowledge on a language that is constructed for, with, and by community members, and that is therefore not primarily for or by linguists’ (Czaykowska-Higgins 2009). Fieldwork is vital in the documentation of endangered languages, and it “involves the recording, representation, elaboration and archiving of primary data” (Lehmann 2004). Thus, the identification of the linguistic categories and their domains was done in collaboration with native speakers who are knowledgeable aspects of the people’s culture. These categories of persons are referred to as process owners, such as traditional rulers with their councils of chiefs, religious leaders, fishermen, crop farmers, canoe carvers,

traditional birth attendants, native speaking teachers, local handicraftsman, etc. Oral tradition was relied upon as it remains the dominant means of communication, especially with elderly people, non-literate, and lack of written literature in the native language for reference. Telephone and email communications were also used to complement the data capturing process, mainly with the educated population, the diaspora, and linguistic consultants.

4. The data

The samples of the linguistic data are grouped under three source areas, viz, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary.

4.1 Primary linguistic data

The primary linguistic data in this study includes the input obtained firsthand from authentic or original sources, such as experienced process owners or subject matter experts of native vocations of Abureni people. This set of data was captured through oral interviews with the native speakers during fieldwork.

4.2 Secondary linguistic data

The secondary data in this study are those derived from some of the primary data, such as historical and cultural information provided orally by the elderly people of the speech communities, and dialect groups.

4.3 Tertiary linguistic data

The tertiary data were mainly those derived from existing literature, such as the suite of scripture publications and linguistic reference materials being used in the Abureni Bible Translation Project. It includes linguistic data made available via the Paratext software for translation, documentation, analysis, storage, and publication in print and electronic media. The translated texts from the suite of scripture materials are presented in draft form and reviewed with native speakers as part of the field work. Then the reviewed material is team-checked by representative Translators/Reviewers, and further checked by Scripture Translation Consultants/Linguists.

4.4 Non-linguistic data

The fourth set of data is derived from non-linguistic data such as support services related to cost, time, and resources. Cost involves all the issues related to funding, such as donation/support-income and expenditure on the agreed project activities. The time frame allocated to each aspect of the project is described here, providing a means of measuring, and evaluating the amount and value of actual work done. Equipment, material, and people (human) are covered under Resources. The resources data provides a means of ascertaining the adequacy, effectiveness of the resources that have been provided for the project, and if they would be sustained into the future. Partnership and stakeholder involvement are captured under each of the activity areas for which linguistic data is generated. The sample population for 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4 are as follows:

- a) Project Team/Partners: 35 persons (Abureni Communities 29; AEO 2; LIST Consultants 4).
- b) Language Committee with community representation in Abureni (Kugbo) in Rivers State: 10 persons (Teachers 2, Clergy 2, Native Speakers 2, Linguists 2, Women 2)
- c) Stakeholder representation at Language Development Seminars/Townhall sessions using Amuruto, 2017 crusade and seminars event register: A total of 227 persons made up of 121 men and 156 women, including teenage children. The breakdown of the number of persons involved by community and the diaspora is Amuruto (111), Emago (51), Akani (38), Idema (22), Amurukeni (20), Kolo (7), Okoroba (5), Ogbema-Okoroba (5), Agrisaba (3), Ogboloma (2), Otuokpoti (1), Port Harcourt (11), Abuja (1).

Table 1

List of partners involved in the Abureni Scripture Translation and Language Development Project

Partners	Roles in the project (Funding, impact, logistics, publication, church relations, advisory committee, local church, international NGO, etc.)	Internal Or External
Luke Initiative for Scripture Translation (LIST) - Nigeria	Project management, training, church relations, financial administration, technical and logistical support, and consulting	External
Abureni Evangelical Outreach (AEO)	AEO is a volunteer non-denominational Christian organization that draws membership at individual level from the listed Churches. They have promoted The Abureni Bible Translation Project and will serve as the Language Committee.	Internal
Different church denominations in the language area	Identify and provide personnel such as translators and other staff, praying, encourage review, testing and use of the translations and raising local financial support	Internal
The language communities	Provide material, financial, and moral support, plus linguistic, historical, and cultural input. Reviewing, testing, and authenticating linguistic data as native speakers.	Internal
Seed Company	Funding, technical support, assist in designing the project	External
SIL Nigeria	Vernacular Media Services (VMS) for audio recording	External
Great Commission Movement of Nigeria (GCMN)	Arrange for the recording of the Jesus Film and training of Church leaders and other personnel for the use of the Jesus Film for evangelism and discipleship.	External

Source: LIST/AEO Partnership MOU, 2017

5. Data analysis and findings

A list of internal and external partners, and stakeholders is available with their roles and responsibilities. Also, a Project Organization Chart that illustrates the interface management processes is in place. It was found that the first Scripture documentation through partnership and stakeholder participation commenced in 2017, with a scope that included the production of literacy awareness material on The Abureni Language. The literacy material is

in

Reading and Writing in The Abureni Language Osen (Ogo) na Oge da Onu Abureni

3.2 Agala itulugiom “morphological level” continued

Aguo otulugi ikpo okoroko omutiom opadi ekpo afugh: Epele... Jpadi Ikpo Afugh

Tughane ma asen jpaḍi afugh ya oḍi ḍa ologi epele wa oḍi ma ise bhḡ. Bḡka kesi kesi ola anwa awa ḍa ekpo afugh anwa aloghom aguḡ osen, boḍḡ ka anwa na age anwa aloghom wa anwa ta age bhḡ.

Obhin otuom: **Abafu** aḍigh isar jpaḍi afugh (**a, ba, fu**). Ḍa epele bhḡ anwa ta abigh jpaḍi bhḡ ḍa (1,0; 1,1; 10,6). **Ena** aḍigh jwal jpaḍi afugh (**e, na**), ta obigh ḍa (3,0; 2,15).

Idi jpaḍi afugh bhḡ ileghan ḍḡ ma onigha ezin, sa na epuru ma ologh ekpo okoroko wa asoran bhḡ oleghemeni. **Okoj** aḍigh jwal jpaḍi afugh (**o, ko, j**). Ḍa epele bhḡ anwa ta abigh a “**o**” ḍa 8,0; **ko** ḍa 8,11. Okoroko na amite, ya jyar otej ezin wa na obhoroḡ bhḡ ta obar na “**j**” ologh. **Izoko** eka okua, ta ologh a “**i**” obhin oke ma ekpo afugh bhḡ.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0		a	ḡ	e	ḡ	i	j	o	ḡ	u	ḡ
1	b	ba	ba	be	be	bi	bj	bo	bo	bu	bu
2	b	ba	ba	be	be	bi	bj	bo	bo	bu	bu
3	bh	bha	bha	bhe	bhe	bhi	bhj	bho	bho	bhu	bhu
4	d	da	da	de	de	di	dj	do	do	du	du
5	ḡ	ḡa	ḡa	ḡe	ḡe	ḡi	ḡj	ḡo	ḡo	ḡu	ḡu
6	f	fa	fa	fe	fe	fi	fj	fo	fo	fu	fu
7	g	ga	ga	ge	ge	gi	gj	go	go	gu	gu
8	gb	gba	gba	gbe	gbe	gbi	gbj	gbo	gbo	gbu	gbu
9	gh	gha	gha	ghe	ghe	ghi	ghj	gho	gho	ghu	ghu
10	h	ha	ha	he	he	hi	hj	ho	ho	hu	hu
11	k	ka	ka	ke	ke	ki	kj	ko	ko	ku	ku
12	kp	kpa	kpa	kpe	kpe	kpi	kpj	kpo	kpo	kpu	kpu
13	l	la	la	le	le	li	lj	lo	lo	lu	lu
14	m	ma	ma	me	me	mi	mj	mo	mo	mu	mu
15	n	na	na	ne	ne	ni	nj	no	no	nu	nu
16	nw	nwa	nwa	nwe	nwe	nwi	nwj	nwo	nwo	nwu	nwu
17	ny	nya	nya	nye	nye	nyi	nyj	nyo	nyo	nyu	nyu
18	p	pa	pa	pe	pe	pi	pj	po	po	pu	pu
19	r	ra	ra	re	re	ri	rj	ro	ro	ru	ru
20	s	sa	sa	se	se	si	sj	so	so	su	su
21	t	ta	ta	te	te	ti	tj	to	to	tu	tu
22	v	va	va	ve	ve	vi	vj	vo	vo	vu	vu
23	w	wa	wa	we	we	wi	wj	wo	wo	wu	wu
24	y	ya	ya	ye	ye	yi	yj	yo	yo	yu	yu
25	z	za	za	ze	ze	zi	zj	zo	zo	zu	zu

various formats but primarily intended to teach people how to read and write in the language.

Table 2
Sample Abureni Language literacy awareness material

Source: Etire & Paul 2018, p. 10

An orthography has been developed and an orthography book along with a book on the counting system have been published and were dedicated and launched in 2015. An

alphabet book was also published in 2016. An Abureni Dictionary is being built with 3372 words entered so far in **WeSay**, which is a software that “helps non-linguists build a dictionary in their own language” (SIL International 2021). According to Etire (2015:5-6), a plan exists to cascade the documentation output, such as the Abureni Orthography via road shows to schools, townhall meetings, marketplaces, waterfronts, Churches, social groups and other public gatherings in order to encourage the teaching and study of the language. Field visits to the speech communities were both planned, and opportunity based. This method helped to optimize the available resources and minimize cost, considering the logistic challenges of the area.

Some years ago, some people attempted to do some raw translation of the Gospel of Luke and there are also a few Bible passages that were translated by certain individuals but not in an organized format. Presently, there is a conscious effort by Abureni people to undertake their language documentation work through a representative central mechanism that reflects the various speech communities and interest groups. The Abureni Evangelical Outreach (AEO) is seen to be facilitating the process by managing the identified interfaces among the partners and stakeholders. Daniel (2017, p. 244) observes that AEO ‘has been in the forefront of organizing crusades and other peace-related programmes, including medicare, etc., which have helped a great deal in promoting unity and peaceful coexistence and generally healthy relations in Abureni.’ Firstly, the approach has been to harness human resources from appropriate backgrounds, expose them to language documentation principles under an agreed interface protocol, and create a common understanding on the need to deliver an acceptable and sustainable project. The Project Team had completed the translation of the Gospel of Luke into Abureni Language and published it in 2021.

6.1 Measurement, monitoring, and reporting of involvement performance.

Partnership and stakeholder involvement have continued to provide the means through which the gains of the projects are recorded. One of the performance indicators is the number of man-days expended on stipulated tasks considered to be critical to the success of the work.

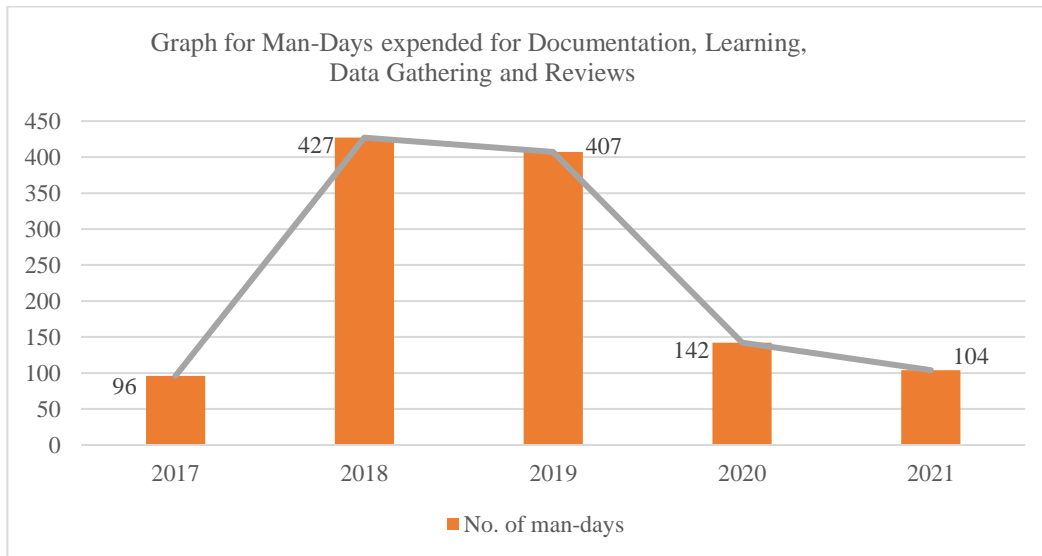


Figure 1
Graphical presentation of the Total Man-days for Abureni Language Documentation, Learning, Data Gathering and Review

The analysis of the activities over the period 2017 to 2021 in figure 1, shows that the man-days expended were 96 man-days in 2017 when the project started. The figure rose sharply to 427 in 2018, and in 2019 it was 407 man-days, which was a fair correlation to the value in the previous year. The value dropped to 142 man-hours in 2020 and 104 in 2021, due to low activities associated with the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a Language Committee with membership that captures the sensitivities of the dialect groups, gender concerns, teaching, and linguistic resources. For example, in Rivers State, the committee was established to facilitate the implementation of “A Law to provide the teaching of indigenous languages in schools in Rivers State” (Government of Rivers State of Nigeria, 2006: A11).

Table 3
Rivers State Languages Development Forum

Membership Categories	No. of Persons Required	Names	Community/ Comments
Native Speakers	2	1. Engr. Daniami Etire 2. Sir Engr. Emmanuel R. Paul	Emago (Leader) Akani Kugbo
Teachers	2	1. Chief Nduaku I. Offor 2. Mr. Quinton A. Edighotu	Amuruto Kugbo Emago Kugbo
Linguists	2	1. Mr. Charles Goodluck Fubara 2. Rev. Samuel Edoghotu	Akani Kugbo Amuruto Kugbo
Clergy	2	1. Ven. Rufus T. Etire 2. Rev. Canon Olaguokare Ibote	Emago Kugbo Akani Kugbo
Women	2	1. Madam Veronica T. Ebua 2. Miss Tolini F. Ogbozige	Amuruto/Teacher Emago Kugbo/linguist
Total	10		Abureni (Kugbo)

Source: Rivers State Languages Development Forum – Abureni Committee 19th Jan 2021.

Table 3 shows that each of the three Abureni communities located in Rivers States’ Abua/Odual Local Government Area (LGA) are represented in the Language Committee. Emago, being the largest of the three communities, has four representatives, while Akani and Amuruto have three representatives each. In addition, the distribution is such that each specialist area is represented by two members, including women.

6.2 Partnership and Stakeholder involvement in funding the project

The funding for each of the five years under review covers the underlisted budget items (monetary values not included):

- a) Cost on Consultancy (Linguistics and other professional expertise, as applicable).
- b) Logistic cost for field work (visits to and from the speech communities)
- c) Logistics to and from the Project management office located in Port Harcourt.
- d) Representatives from Abureni Communities in Bayelsa and Rivers States via water and road transport.
- e) Logistics for Consultants to and from Luke Initiative for Scripture Translation (LIST) office located in Jos, Plateau state, Nigeria. It includes visits by Officers from the Academia and Government Agencies.
- f) Accommodation cost for the duration of each outstation event.
- g) Feeding costs for all participants at each outstation event.
- h) Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) cost involving costs related to computers, digital still cameras, video cameras, printers, storage devices, network services, software renewals, etc.
- i) Utility costs (cost of running private electric power generators as none of the Abureni communities is hooked to the National Grid).
- j) Learning, Research and Development Cost, including attendance at linguistic workshops and seminars/conferences, such as State Language Forums, Language Development Institute learnings, Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria (CLAN), Conference of Nigerian Languages Project (CNLP), West African Linguistic Society (WALS) conferences, etc. It involved the use of air transport to address special needs (e.g., transport to and from Abuja, Lagos, and overseas).
- k) Cost of Review meetings at designated venues such as Zonal Offices, Port Harcourt and Yenagoa, etc.
- l) Cost of production/publication of language documentation and literacy campaign materials.
- m) Administrative cost which includes office equipment, consumables, and remuneration for Project office staff on full-/part-time.
- n) Honoraria to translators.
- o) Miscellaneous cost to cover variations and emergencies.

Table 4
Partnership and Stakeholder involvement in Learning, Data Gathering and Reviews

Abureni Language Documentation, Development & Advocacy Project									
Partnership & Stakeholder Involvement: Learning & Data Review Workshops, 2017-2021									
Community Representatives, Translators, Reviewers & Consultants									
S/No	Organisation/ Community	No. of Reps.	No. of man-days						
			2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total 2017-21	% of Total
1	AEO	6	20	76	74	34	30	234	19.9%
2	LIST	4	8	66	80	26	25	205	17.4%
3	Akani	5	10	58	17	12	14	111	9.4%
4	Idema	3	0	0	25	20	18	63	5.4%
5	Emago	3	10	64	67	13	10	164	13.9%
6	Amuruto	4	10	43	55	17	7	132	11.2%
7	Okoroba	2	0	36	18	10	0	64	5.4%
8	Amurukeni	3	18	38	25	10	0	91	7.7%
9	Opume	2	10	9	28	0	0	47	4.0%
10	Kolo	1	10	29	18	0	0	57	4.8%
11	Agrisaba	1	0	8	0	0	0	8	0.7%
TOTAL		34	96	427	407	142	104	1176	100%

7. Problems and challenges

- a) The project relied mainly on voluntary donors to fund its activities in terms of Cost, Time, and Human resources.
- b) There is a general clamour for inclusion by the dialect groups to ensure that the linguistic aspects of their people are captured in the language documentation. Find

below sample feedback from a literate Respondent over the listing of some native kitchen equipment and community town halls.

Respondent's feedback on 2nd April 2021

Ánwà ádíghì mà àdírè wà ánwà ígè ínínhá íyâr bhó.
/án^wá édíyì mà èdírè wé ánwà ígé ínáyé ijàr βó/
You done.well for book that you wrote gave us the
'Thank you for the book you wrote for us in our language'

Dá ádírè bhò, èkpá, àgùgh, ìgàdì, bhá ódì;
/dá édírè βò, èkpá ègùg ìgàdì βó ódì/
In book the, mortar, pot, spoon, are there;
'In the book, mortar, pot, and spoon are listed.

Yáà, òkpákò nà ògbíómá údû, bhú bò.
/jê òkpákò nà ògbíómá údû bú bò/
But, native spoon and grinder.of pepper are not.
'But I notice that the native spoon and pepper grinder are not included.'

Kǒ ógâm
/kǒ ógâm/
Don't vex.
'Do not feel offended.'

Project Team member's response

Àdíò ná agùl é?
/ədìò nó ógùl é/
Weather is nightfall is.not.it?
'Good evening.'

Àmí nà àsèbh ánwà mà ìdíàr yà ánwà ísén íbígh bhó.
/ámí nè àsèβ án^wà mà ìdíàr jà án^wà ísén íbíy βó/
I am thanking you for things that you read saw the.
'Thank you for communicating your observations after reviewing the document.'

Yìì, àmì àmàrà má ábhòn òlògh òkpákò dá ólògì.
/jìì àmì émèrè mǎ éβòn òlòy òkpákò dǎ ólògì/
Yes, I agree that is good to put native spoon at inside.
'I accept your comment to include pepper grinder in the list of kitchen equipment.'

Tà òbàrà̀m nà ìpàn ìdíà̀r mà ìgìèl tá ónwé ódà mà àdìrè bhó ómútìòm.
/tè òbàrà̀m nè ìpèn ìdíà̀r mà ìgìèl tá ón^wé ódà mà àdìrè βó ómútìòm/
Will addition and other things at period that again print of book the bring out.
'We shall include such changes in the new version of the book or printout.'

Respondent's feedback on 16th April 2021

Ná agùl é?
/nǎ égùl é/
It is nightfall is not it?
'Good evening'

Àmì ìpùtá ìbìgh ópàn ábár ólá àmì ná rá ólòghòm.
/àmì ìpùtá ìbìy òpàn ábár ólá àmì ná rá ólòyòm/
I again have seen another thing that I want to know.
'I have identified another issue which I need clarification.'

Rùgàlà bhò, ùgàlá Émágo é mà dójòm bhú bǒ ànì dǎ ádìrè bhó.
/rùgàlà βò ùgàlá émágo é mà dójòm βó bǒ ànì dǎ ádìrè bǒ/
Townhalls the, townhall Emago town your is not also not in book the.
'Community townhalls are listed, but you failed to include that of Emago your town.'

Èzìn kéré?
/èzìn kéré/
Reason is what?
'Why is it so?'

Project team member's response

Ánwà àmàr ábìgh. Kǒ ókùnù. Tà òlògì mà ìmòm ìdíà̀r yà ánwà ná ábìgh bhó.
/án^wá àmàr ábìy kǒ ókònó tè òlògì mà ìmòm ìdíà̀r jà án^wá ná ábìy βó/
You very well saw it. Don't worry. Will put in new things that you have seen the.

‘You have observed correctly. Be assured that your comments will be reflected in the updated version.’

Ánwà ònì!

/án^wà ònì/

You great.person!

‘That is very nice of you.’

Bhìnè má òkúá mà àgìòm dá éḍià. Ògìr bhó òlà éblá íyàr.

/βìnè mé òkúá mà àgìòm dḗ eqìè ògìr βó òlè eblá íjàr/

Take like so and go.on to front. Work the is.for all.of us.

‘You can be relied upon! Continue your good effort. The work is for all of us.’

Ánwà áḍìghí.

/án^wà áḍìghí/

You well.done!

“Thank you.”

It is noted that in both cases, the project team shows empathy in their responses, offers necessary clarification, and encourages the respondents to sustain their feedback efforts. Such an approach enhances good working relationships among the partners and the stakeholders. Another observation is that the speech communities expect their representatives in the project team to protect their interests and be answerable to them.

- c) Aging of members of the Project Team based on empirical measurements between 2017 and 2021. The chart in Figure 2 shows that 19 members representing 54.3% of the project team fall within 40-59 years age range, while 10 members (28.6%) are above 60 years. Only 6 members or 17.1% are within 20-39 years, a situation that appears unsustainable in the next 20 years. This calls for the need to identify and train potential project team members with the right competencies and experiences to fill in from behind.

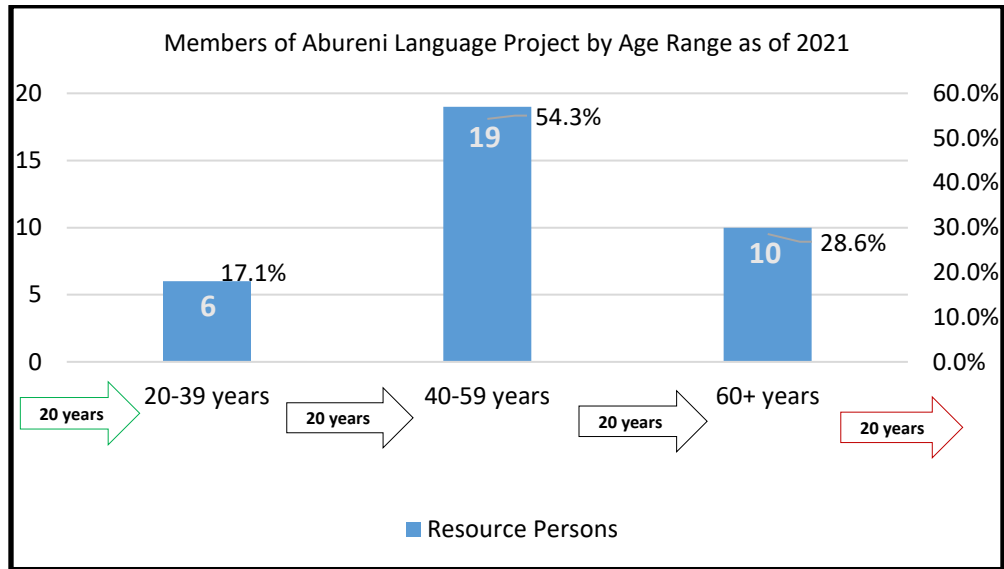


Figure 2

Aging of Project Team Members

Source: Abureni Bible Translation and Language Development Report, April 2021.

- d) Lack of indigenous linguists in the Project as shown in Figure 3 below, as the team mainly relies on the Consultant linguists who also cover other language groups. Only two Graduate linguists have been working on the project, unfortunately, one of them died in 2020, creating a gap. The rest of the team members belong to other professions, with engineering and the clergy topping the list. The situation required the indigenes to attend language workshops and conferences.

Following this, nine members of the team attended the Conference of the Nigerian Languages at the University of Uyo in 2021. Three members of the team also attended the annual Linguistic Association of Nigeria conferences at the University of Abuja 2019, the University of Benin 2021, and Lagos State University 2021. The Project team embarks on a sensitization programme to encourage the indigenes to acquire Diploma and Degree in Linguistics.

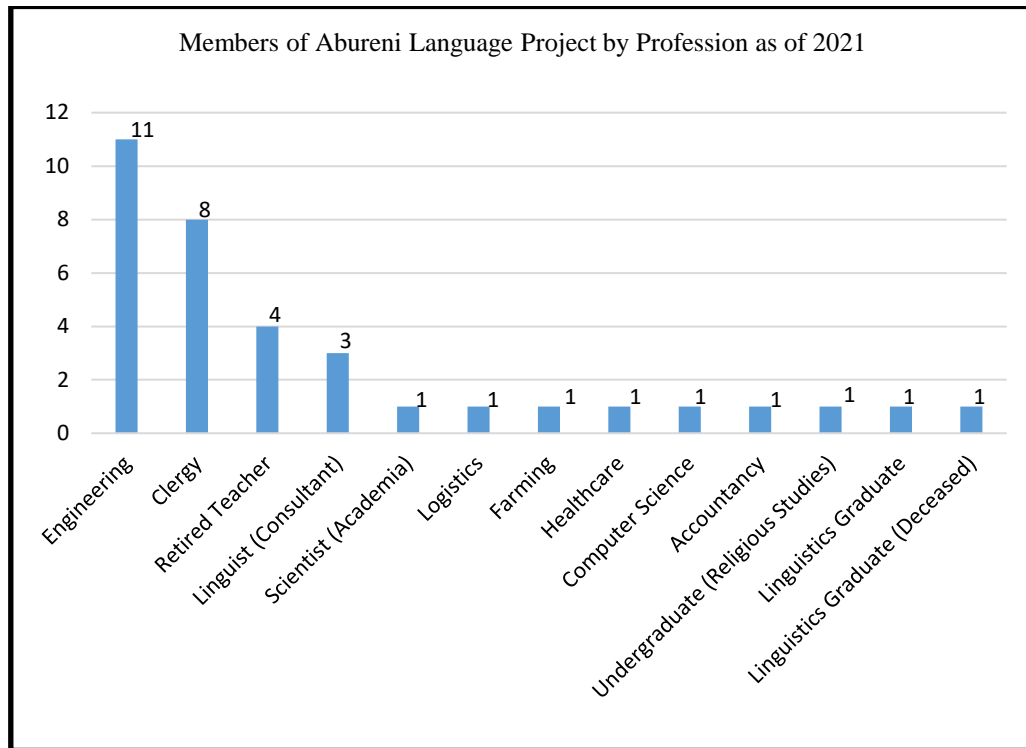


Figure 3
 Professional Distribution of Project Team members
Source: Abureni Bible Translation and Language Development Report, April 2021.

- e) Low involvement of some stakeholder communities, especially those in remote locations as reflected in Figure 4 below. This potentially creates poor understanding of the aims and objectives of the documentation project, which in the extreme would lead to the loss of their support. It requires such communities to be sensitized on the importance of participation, instead of allowing the project team to play a facilitating role all the time.

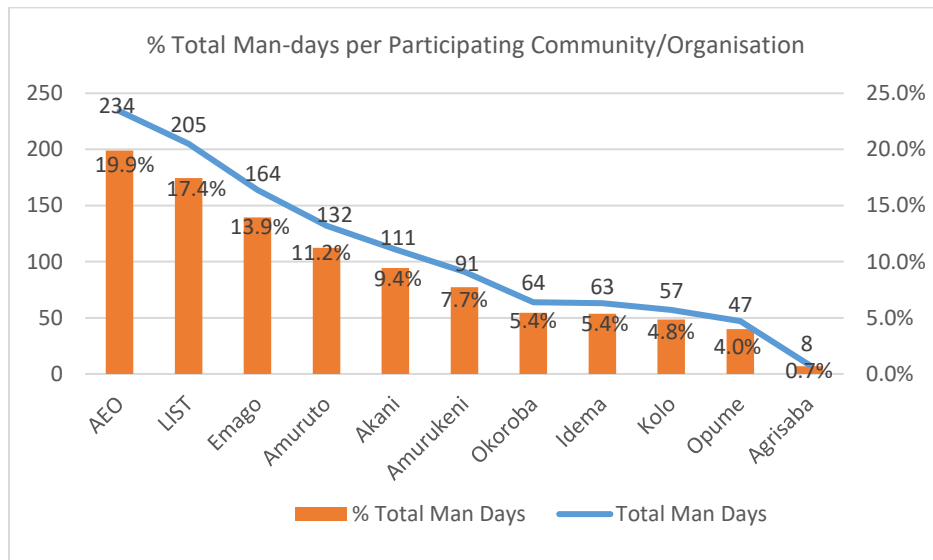


Figure 4
Graphical presentation of the Total Man-days per participating Community or Organization in Abureni Language Documentation Learning, Data Gathering and Review

The chart in Figure 2 shows that, Abureni Evangelical Outreach (AEO) and Luke Initiative for Scripture Translation (LIST) expended 234 man-days (19.9%) and 205 man-days (17.4%) respectively of the total man-days on documentation, teaching, learning and review during the 5-year period. Such an outcome was expected, AEO and LIST being the principal partners and the rallying points in providing the linguistic and native speaker expertise. The level of participation at community level varies from one community to another, depending on their representation, initial buy-in, and the penetration of the engagements. The corrective action would be to increase the rate and quality of awareness engagements in the areas with low performance like Opume with 47 man-days (4%), and Agrisaba with 8 man-days (0.7%), to potentially raise their level of involvement in subsequent events.

8. Recommendations

- a) Seek opportunities for a sustainable means of funding, including an incentive scheme, to complement the current resource base that relies on interested donors only. Action: Project Team; Target - end 2022.
- b) Mutually address any concerns that are raised by the stakeholders. Ensure that the interests of the constituent dialect groups are captured in project activities, and consistently involve the stakeholders in such a way that the deliverables are acceptable to all of them as native speakers. Action: Project Team; Target - continual.
- c) Identify and train potential project team members with the right competences and experiences to fill in from behind. Action: Project Team; Target - end 2022.
- d) Search for Undergraduate and Post Graduate Students currently studying linguistics and motivate them to be interested in the Project and research on The Abureni Language. Also, embark on career counselling to encourage potential undergraduates of Abureni to consider studying linguistics as an option. Action: Project Team (liaising with CNLP and LAN); Target - end 2023.
- e) Increase the rate and quality of literacy awareness engagements in the areas with low performance, especially in remote field locations to enhance their involvement and understanding of the project objectives. Project Team; Target - Immediate and continuous.

9. Conclusion

From the data analysis and the interface management processes in place, we are of the view that partnership with both internal and external stakeholders and a sustained involvement from them, are enablers in delivering an indigenous language documentation and advocacy project. The role of a central body that facilitates the project activities is critical to achieve results and embed mutual trust and respect among the partners and stakeholders. When native speakers, as primary stakeholders, are involved in making input to language documentation, and critique the data, they are better able to accept the outputs and support the work.

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