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 SOLUTIONS TO ENHANCE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN NIGERIA.

Pre-colonization was an era in every African country as a time of richness in culture, language, use of resources adequately, political issues and many more. However, when the colonialists came to Africa, they brought in their own customs and way of living and forced it on Africans. They were drawn here by our abundant natural resources which they lacked, and rather than to try and look for a way in which both parties could benefit from the resources they took it forcefully. They took Africans as slaves to their various countries, enforced the use of speaking English in administrative sectors, education, religious gatherings and so on. Unfortunately, even now that they are gone, the impact they had on Africans is still affecting many nations of this great continent.

Unlike before colonialization, indigenous languages now, are not seen as something of importance. Instead, speaking in ones traditional language makes you come up as uneducated, local, old fashioned, etc. It’s unfortunate because language is one of the criteria to achieving development in the country and also because language and culture go hand in hand with one another: when language dies, the culture also dies.

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and because of its population, it has a diversity of people and their different cultures, languages, dressing, food, etc. In so many ways, this is one of the beauty of Nigeria. However, this has made it almost impossible to come up with the country’s national language because if one language is chosen as the national language, other tribes would start to feel jealous and this may cause conflict. Due to this, the national language has become English. English is now being used in every sector in the country; media and information, education, politics, offices, etc. Also, because the colonial masters used English in administrative issues, Nigerians continued in that way even after they were gone. Also, those who knew how to speak English were perceived as educated, the elite, people of high status and so on. So it is not surprising that those who did not know how to speak English felt compelled to learn the language.

However, it should be the opposite, knowing ones traditional language and culture should be the pride of the person. Unfortunately, this is not the case in most African countries and most especially, Nigeria. As stated before, Nigeria is a country with diverse cultures, languages, dressing, etc. In Nigeria, before, there were about 529 different languages. Now the number is decreasing. Some of them have become extinct and some are almost at the bridge of extinction.

Even with all these disadvantages, it is still not too late. With determination and consistency, Indigenous languages could rise up from the hole they have been dug in. This task, however, will be extremely difficult given it is a country with diverse traditions but, it is not impossible. It is not new to anyone that prevention is better than cure, so, before all the languages in Nigeria become extinct, one should be looking for ways to promote these languages. Some solutions are;

1. Deploying Indigenous language as language of education; although there are laws in Nigeria that state that the language of communication in school should be the language of the closest community where the school resides, there are still so many schools in Nigeria that still use European languages, especially private schools. It is a fact that children can learn something and still hold on to it till they are about 12 years old and that any age beyond that might be difficult for the person to grasp the language. So, if Indigenous languages are used as the language of communication in Nigeria from nusery school to junior secondary school, it will be a big step in promoting the nations’ cultural languages.
2. Deploying Indigenous language as the language for media and information; this second point if taken seriously will be another huge step in promoting Indigenous languages in Nigeria. This is so because, irrespective of the impact the colonialist had on Nigeria in the language aspect, there are still some people who don’t know how to speak English and these people are among the masses. So, if news was casted in the language of the people, it will not only promote the Indigenous languages but, it will also help a long way in the development of the country. Another way that news can be cast is through newspapers. Newspapers should be published in Indigenous languages.
3. Another way Indigenous languages can be promoted is if they are used as the language for advertisement. Advertisement comes in different forms, some of which are; television, billboards, handbills, etc. The advertisement board should enforce the rule that anyone who wants to advertise their products should use the language of the closest community. For instance, in a place like Ibadan city, since the language spoken is Yoruba, anything that is going to be advertised would be in Yoruba. That means that every billboard in the city that is advertising anything would be written in Yoruba with English translation underneath for those who don’t speak Yoruba. This should not only be for billboards, but for every form of advertisement in the country.
4. Promoting books written Indigenous language: librarians or anyone capable should help to promote books written in Indigenous languages. Efforts should be made by library and information science professionals in ensuring that books are written in the various Indigenous languages and that they are made accessible to the people of the country. This will go a long way and would bring awareness of these Indigenous languages. Books used in the nusery and primary schools should be published in Indigenous languages.
5. Apart from the afore mentioned, an important aspect in promoting Indigenous languages is the ‘will’ of the speakers. Without ‘will’ there is little hope. To promote will, the language should be contextualized as a pragmatic tool in important aspects of daily life. To contextualize the language in todays’ modern society one must employ deliberate research to assess where language use would be maximized in a fluid non-academic space.

Indigenous languages keep people connected to culture and this strengthens feelings of pride and self worth. Cultural knowledge, kinship, song lines and stories are reliant on language in order for these important cultural elements to be passed on from generation to generation. Nigeria has a better chance of gaining the respect of the world and being regarded as an equal with other nations when it uses its indigenous Nigerian languages for governance and formal education.