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**Gorwaa Language Project  
Action Plan I  
2017-2022**

**Introduction**

The following action plan comes as a result of five years of close collaboration between local Gorwaa language community members (Josiah Sumaye, Hezekiah Kodi, Raheli Lawi, Andrea Tsino, Paschal Bu'ú, Stephano Edward, and Festo Massani), and a foreign linguist (Andrew Harvey). It is meant to serve as both an account of their reflections on the current state of Gorwaa language loss, as well as a path forward for community-centered language revitalization.

**Assessing the Root Causes of Gorwaa Language Endangerment**

The Gorwaa language is in a serious state of decline, with fewer fluent speakers, and fewer opportunities to speak. In an exercise designed to find the root causes of Gorwaa language endangerment, the following was identified:

The Gorwaa Language and Traditions Are Being Lost

This is largely due to:

*The language and culture losing relevance and uses*

Contributing factors:

- restrictions (legal and social) on the use of traditional languages and the practice of certain traditions
- fundamental changes to the local environment (both social and environmental), brought about by colonialism, the state government, and globalization
- decline of oral transmission of culture, and simultaneous increase of modern reliance on text (while Gorwaa lacks a widely-known writing system)

*Parents no longer passing the language and culture to children*

Contributing factors:

- Gorwaa is no longer being spoken in the home
- local traditions are no longer being practiced in the home
- families today may be ethnically mixed
- modern lifestyles (especially long working hours) and schooling have effectively taken the responsibility of the parent as a teacher and transferred it to the government
- traditional sources of information and entertainment have largely been supplanted by mass media and social media

*Gender inequality*

Contributing factors:

- the unique and powerful position of women in traditional Gorwaa society is currently unknown or poorly understood

-women today do not have the time to maintain and develop the Gorwaa language due to the disproportionate burden of labour often placed on them (cooking, caring for children and the ill, etc.)

*People no longer value their language or traditions*

Contributing factors:

-children are taught (directly or indirectly) that the Gorwaa language and traditions are bad

-Gorwaa people lack spaces and events in which to socialize and interact as Gorwaa people

-family and ethnic history is no longer being passed on

-age-set-based education is no longer given

*Widespread poverty puts the maintenance and development of language and culture behind seeing to basic needs*

-English and Swahili are both identified as languages of commerce and self-improvement, at the expense of Gorwaa, which is viewed as a valueless language

-work related to the maintenance and development of Gorwaa language and culture is not seen as gainful employment (i.e. it does not pay)

-incomes which do not meet basic needs contribute to the loss of the language and culture

### **Gorwaa Language Maintenance: A Vision**

Following the identification of some of the root causes of Gorwaa language and culture endangerment, individuals were challenged to imagine a world in which the Gorwaa language and culture were being maintained and developed. This was what they saw:

#### A Vision

##### *Of the people*

-people give of themselves, helping their neighbours

-young people are given the opportunity for age-set-based education

-young people can identify and understand traditional values

-visitors are encouraged by the Gorwaa people, seeing them as inspiration for building a society based on their aspirations

-people are healthy

-people are proud of their traditional clothing, and often wear it

-opportunities for people to come together as Gorwaa are

available

-gender equality is a reality

##### *Of the land*

-environments that had been destroyed are built anew, following traditional inspiration

-the land is green

-trees, rivers, forests, and places with water are respected

- synthetic agrochemicals have been replaced by traditional fertilizers and pesticides
- there is no longer famine
- Of the work*
  - ‘development’ is driven by the people themselves, rather than only by the government
  - traditional biological treatments are understood as legitimate medicine, and used when appropriate
  - traditional songs are known and sung
  - traditional games are known and played
  - people farm sorghum and people eat sorghum, along with other traditional foods
  - traditional collective work is practiced (both in the field and elsewhere)
  - Gorwaa is spoken at work, at community meetings, in church, etc. People who do not speak Gorwaa are guaranteed interpretation
  - youth are employed
  - living wages are available

### **Bringing About Change: Proposed Specific Actions for 2017-2022**

With some root causes of today’s problem identified, and with a vision for the future articulated, individuals generated a long-list of proposed actions which could be undertaken over the coming 5 years. Following a process in which proposed actions were evaluated according to how effectively they dealt with root causes and helped achieve the vision, the following actions were identified as priorities for 2017-2022.

#### **Establishing a Self-Reliant Committee**

Individuals identified that many of the most impactful actions that may be taken to maintain and develop the Gorwaa language and culture will be taken by individuals and independent social groups (families, clubs, cooperatives, etc.). With this said, it was still agreed that establishing a small, adaptable committee whose central concern was the maintenance and development of the Gorwaa language, was an essential step in realizing the vision articulated above.

The committee will work toward the vision by:

1-A: undertaking the actions outlined in this Action Plan, reviewing progress yearly, and continually evaluating the impact of the Action Plan (with an impact report published every four years)

1-B: developing a new Action Plan for the years 2022-2027 (development to begin no later than January 2021)

1-C: meeting every three months

1-D: holding extraordinary meetings, when and if needed

It was agreed that it was very important for the committee to be as self-reliant as possible. As such, it was decided that a small endowment become the basis for initial (ethical) local investment, and eventually a growing funding base for the committee and its actions.

### Encouraging the Use of the Gorwaa Language in the Home

Use of the Gorwaa language within the home was identified as the single most effective way to maintain and develop the Gorwaa language and traditions. This is also the most complex and intimate of the actions identified, and will require concerted, long-term action to be effectively accomplished.

This action will be undertaken by:

2-A: encouraging academic research to 1) identify the root causes of why the Gorwaa language is no longer being spoken in the home; and 2) suggest strategies to revitalize its use in the home

2-B: acting on these suggested strategies

2-C: evaluating the impact of this action

### Encouraging the Use of the Gorwaa Language in the Community

Use of the Gorwaa language in the larger community was identified as a major way to raise the profile of the language, and ultimately to broaden the list of places in which Gorwaa is spoken. This is a long-term action, which will ultimately succeed through a series of small, well-targeted steps.

This action will be undertaken by:

3-A: identifying a list of community spaces in which use of the Gorwaa language may be encouraged. This list may include:

-places of worship (of both the Christian and Muslim faiths)

-sports teams

-savings cooperatives (vikoba, etc.)

-neighbourhoods

3-B: holding small meetings with group members in order to identify individual strategies for introducing or strengthening use of Gorwaa

3-C: implementing these individual strategies, monitoring their success, and adjusting as necessary. This step should be carried out in cooperation with group members themselves.

3-D: evaluating the impact of this action

### Developing a Traditional Prayer Especially for Committing to the Gorwaa Language

One of the first actions to be identified was that of committing to the cause. This commitment must come from committee members, associated researchers, and key community members and participants. The Gorwaa people possess a rich tradition of prayer, still practiced by customary elders. Developing a traditional prayer to affirm one's commitment to the maintenance and development of the Gorwaa language and culture would be a powerful symbol, as well as a relatively easy short-term action.

This action will be undertaken by:

4-A: identifying an elder or a small group of elders who are able to recite Gorwaa prayers

4-B: carefully explaining to them the purpose of the prayer

4-C: working with them to develop a short commitment prayer

4-D: ensuring that this prayer is used (at committee meetings, at events, etc.)

4-E: evaluating the impact of this action

#### Reviving Age-Set-Based Education

Age-set-based education was identified as one of the most effective methods of bridging generational gaps within the community, raising awareness of Gorwaa culture and history, and providing a space for Gorwaa people to be Gorwaa. With this said, this action was required as a very culturally sensitive one, with issues such as secret knowledge, working with youth, and staying true to the traditional content vs. innovating on the practice all being raised as important issues to deal with before bringing this important tradition back.

This action will be undertaken by:

5-A: encouraging academic research to 1) understand how to ethically deal with secret knowledge in Gorwaa culture; 2) develop a pedagogically-sound method of working with young people; 3) identify a method of building a new age-set-based education system from the old one

5-B: conducting informal research with individuals who have been involved in traditional age-set-based education to 1) understand the content of the age-set-based education; and 2) build relationships of trust with the community members involved

5-C: working closely with individuals who have been involved in age-set-based education, develop and implement a small-scale pilot-project to test what has been learned, evaluating and adjusting as necessary

5-D: evaluating the impact of this action

#### Holding Gorwaa Exhibitions of Culture and Language

Given the existence of cultural groups who have continued Gorwaa music and dance traditions, holding a large exhibition to put Gorwaa language and culture on display was identified as a relatively simple action. With this said, holding an event of this scale will be expensive.

This action will be undertaken by:

6-A: identifying an area in which to hold a large-scale event

6-B: meeting with representatives from the community (government, school, cultural groups, etc.) to design an appropriate, community-based event

6-C: developing a budget

6-D: holding the event, being sure to record attendance, provide a detailed report on outcomes, and take photos

6-E: evaluating the impact of this action

#### Creating Gorwaa-Language Music Recordings

Music is a powerful tool for projecting identity, and could be used very effectively to raise the profile of both the Gorwaa musical tradition itself, as well as the language and culture in general. This project is medium-term in scale, and quite expensive.

This action will be undertaken by:

7-A: identifying from the archival recordings 12-15 songs which highlight the diversity, vitality, and unique nature of the Gorwaa musical tradition

- 7-B: decide how each song should be recorded (high-quality field-style recordings, solos and small groups, instrumentals, large groups, etc.)
- 7-C: identify and select individuals to perform and be recorded
- identify an appropriate recording studio with commensurate experience in traditional music
- 7-D: record the music
- 7-E: develop a policy for distributing the music (free, or for profit)
- 7-F: market and distribute the music
- 7-G: evaluating the impact of this action

#### Developing Indigenous Researchers

Several years of work with the foreign linguist have provided valuable insight into the Gorwaa language and culture. With this said, having a team of local Gorwaa researchers to conduct semi-independent work on their own language and culture, in parallel to and in concert with outside researchers, would be a major boon. First, the language and culture would benefit from inside perspectives and intimate access provided by locals. Second, outside researchers would benefit from an increased data set and increased research capacity for larger projects. Third, community impact from skills transferred from local researchers to other individuals (e.g. computer literacy, photography, interview skills), could be considerable. This action is both relatively expensive, and long-term, requiring willingness from outside researchers to teach skills, and for local researchers to become mentors and teachers themselves.

This action will be undertaken by:

- 8-A: identifying the roles of local researchers in the Agenda for Gorwaa Research (see below)
- 8-B: identifying the skills required
- 8-C: developing a 'learning roadmap' to ensure local researchers are taught the required skills
- 8-D: evaluating the impact of this action

#### Supporting Gorwaa-Language Interpreters

Gorwaaland was always multi-ethnic, and, to some extent, multi-lingual. In order to ensure that work on the Gorwaa language and culture does not leave anyone out, it was agreed that interpreters (primarily Gorwaa-Swahili) be supported in order to provide services to those who may not speak Gorwaa.

This action will be undertaken by:

- 9-A: identifying when and where Gorwaa-language interpreters are or may be active
- 9-B: providing training opportunities for Gorwaa-language interpreters
- 9-C: ensuring non-speakers of Gorwaa are provided interpretation services at Gorwaa-language events
- 9-D: evaluating the impact of this action

#### Developing an Agenda for Gorwaa Research

Many of the actions outlined in this section cannot be undertaken without a more thorough understanding of the key concepts involved (modern

farming methods, traditional age-set-based education, etc.). As such, it is essential that a rigorous agenda of research be identified and pursued by the committee. Research, in this sense, is used to include both academic research (conducted by individuals associated with Universities or other higher learning institutions), and amateur research (conducted by trained local individuals).

This action will be undertaken by:

10-A: identifying, within the Proposed Specific Actions for 2017-2022, key concepts which must be further understood before action may be taken

10-B: from these actions, identifying the appropriate people to conduct such research

10-C: overseeing and supporting these individuals to conduct quality research in a timely manner

10-D: evaluating the impact of this action

#### Developing a Traditional Agriculture Scheme

The support of traditional agriculture (defined loosely as the cultivation of sorghum, beans, and a host of other fruits, vegetables, and grains which play an essential role in the traditional Gorwaa diet and economy) has been identified as the most effective way to combat the lingering effects of colonialism. In addition to being better suited to the local climate than introduced crops (especially maize), the sowing, weeding, harvest, and consumption of traditional crops are all intimately tied to Gorwaa festivities and activities. By finding a productive middle-ground between modern farming methods and those traditionally practiced by the Gorwaa people, a whole host of activities (harvest festivals, use of traditional pesticides, consumption of traditional dishes, etc.) could be once again made relevant and invigorated.

This action will be undertaken by:

11-A: conducting research to: determine a basic experimental model for traditional farming methods and modern farming methods to be joined together in a way that honours and respects established Gorwaa practices, as well as ensures that local farmers profit fairly

11-B: developing a 5-year plan which begins with a small rented field overseen by the committee, and ends with a field owned by the committee and ready to operate as a 'demonstration farm' to be adapted as part of a larger cultural programme by local farmers all across Gorwaaland

11-C: evaluating the impact of this action

#### **Action Schedule**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Quarter</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Outputs</b>
2017	1 (Jan. – Mar.)	10-A,B,C: Develop Agenda for Gorwaa Research 11-A: Research Experimental Farming Model	
	2 (Apr. – Jun.)	10-A,B,C: Develop Agenda for Gorwaa Research	10-A,B,C: Agenda for Gorwaa Research 11-A: Experimental

		11-A: Develop Experimental Farming Model	Farming Model
	3 (Jul. –Sept.)	11-B Develop 5-year plan 8-A,B: Identify roles of local researchers and skills needed	
	4 (Oct. – Dec.)	8-C: Develop ‘Learning Roadmap’	1-A: Yearly Progress Report 11-B: 5-year plan
2018	1 (Jan. – Mar.)	4-A,B,C: Gorwaa Traditional Prayer	8-C: ‘Learning Roadmap’
	2 (Apr. – Jun.)	3-A: identifying a list of community spaces	4-A,B,C: Gorwaa Traditional Prayer
	3 (Jul. –Sept.)	3-B: hold small meetings with group members 4-E: Evaluation	
	4 (Oct. – Dec.)	3-B: hold small meetings with group members	1-A: Yearly Progress Report 3-B: strategies for introducing or strengthening use of Gorwaa 4-E: Evaluation
2019	1 (Jan. – Mar.)	3-C: implementing these individual strategies 6-A,B,C: Plan Gorwaa Exhibition	
	2 (Apr. – Jun.)	3-C: implementing these individual strategies 6-A,B,C: Plan Gorwaa Exhibition	
	3 (Jul. –Sept.)	3-C: implementing these individual strategies 6-D: Holding Gorwaa Exhibition	6-D: record attendance and take pictures at Gorwaa Exhibition
	4 (Oct. – Dec.)	3-C: implementing these individual strategies 6-E: Evaluate Gorwaa Exhibition	1-A: Yearly Progress Report
2020	1 (Jan. – Mar.)	9-A: Gorwaa language interpreters	6-E: Gorwaa Exhibition Evaluation
	2 (Apr. – Jun.)	3-D: Evaluation 9-B: Interpreter training	
	3 (Jul. –Sept.)	8-D: Evaluation 9-B: Interpreter training	3-D: Evaluation



	4 (Oct. – Dec.)	10-D: Evaluation	1-A: 4-Year Impact Report 1-A: Yearly Progress Report 8-D: Evaluation 9-C: Provision of interpretrs
2021	1 (Jan. – Mar.)	1-B: Begin Action Plan 2022-2027 7-A, B, C: Music Recordings 12-C: Evaluation	10-D: Evaluation
	2 (Apr. – Jun.)	7-D: Record Music 9-D: Evaluation	11-C: Evaluation
	3 (Jul. –Sept.)	7-D: Record Music 7-E: Develop distribution plan	9-D: Evaluation 7-D: Gorwaa music recordings
	4 (Oct. – Dec.)	7-F: Distribute music	1-B: Action Plan 2022-2027 1-A: Yearly Progress Report
2022	1 (Jan. – Mar.)	7-G: Evaluation	
	2 (Apr. – Jun.)		7-G: Evaluation
	3 (Jul. –Sept.)		
	4 (Oct. – Dec.)		1-A: Yearly Progress Report

Actions 2 and 5 will rely on securing academic researchers. The schedules will depend largely on the individual academic research schedules.