Collaborative projects: three ongoing African experiments

As field linguists working in different parts of Africa, we feel strong pressure from colleagues and language communities to take on more descriptive and documentary projects, due, apparently, to a shortage of competent field workers. For instance, during a five day survey of the languages of Adamawa State in Nigeria in 2011, local school teachers and languages committees systematically urged us to come back and help them develop their language. One way in which we have responded to this pressure on our agenda is to make our research increasingly collaborative. In this contribution we will
discuss three very different ongoing collaborative projects, focusing on methodological

issues:

- the creation of an Eton (Bantu, Cameroon) dictionary for which Mark closely

collaborates with a language committee in Cameroon

- a major documentation of the Myene dialect cluster (Bantu, Gabon), involving a

foreign (Mark) and a native speaker (Odette) linguists and a native speaker

research assistant
- a description of the Bena (Yungur) language (Adamawa, Nigeria), in which Mark and Dmitry have to rely on native speaker collaborators for gathering natural data since the area where the language is spoken has become inaccessible to us.

The collaborative nature of these projects has little influence on the analytical aspects of our work, but thoroughly transforms the data-gathering aspects, to the advantage of both researchers and community members.