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## Communique on the Statutory Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN).

The African Academy of Language (ACALAN) organised a two-day meeting of its Scientific and Technical Committee, on 08 and 09 December 2016, held at ACALAN headquarters in Bamako, Mali.



The objectives of the meeting, as stipulated in article 14 of the statutes, were to examine the activities of ACALAN, taking into account its action plan and assist the Secretariat in the preparation of its 2017 programme of activities and their implementation as well as advise the Secretariat on specific technical matters.

In accordance with the statutes, rules and procedures of ACALAN, the meeting brought together eminent personalities, members of its Scientific and Technical Committee, from Africa and Europe, including Emeritus Prof Ayo Bamgbose, the President of the Assembly of Academicians, Selected heads of the National Language Structures and Chairpersons of the Vehicular Cross-border Language commissions, specialists and representatives of institutions and international organisations such as UNESCO and OIF, and representatives of African Civil Society Organisations.

The opening session under the Chairmanship of Professor Abdulhamid Abubakar, Cordinator of the Hausa Vehicular Cross-border Language Commission, comprises of three remarks as follows:

Mr Adama Samassekou Founding Executive Secretary of ACALAN, expressed his joy for having met again with friends at such an important meeting.

The President of the Assembly of Academicians of ACALAN, Professor Ayo Bamgbose, reminisced the history of ACALAN, and told the delegates that the organisation started as MACALAN before becoming ACALAN. He eulogised the many years when the government of Mali paid ACALAN workers their salaries, and that even today the government has continued to support the academy. He insisted on the need to appoint an Executive Secretary, a position that has been vacant for more than one year, Professor Bamgbose highlighted the issue of financing ACALAN's programmes as another major challenge that needs to be surmounted.

Ambassador Oumar Daou, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in his opening speech, affirmed that no country can develop without its languages. That is why, "the government adopted on December 3, 2014, Mali's National Language Policy, document thus making national languages tools for development in all spheres of life." Ambassador Oumar Daou, hoped that this high-level scientific and technical meeting would be an opportunity for language specialists to once again conduct an in-depth analysis on the problems about language development in Africa and to decide on the major projects of the ACALAN. He assured the delegates of the availability and support of the government to work towards the objectives of ACALAN, namely the promotion and the valorisation of African languages. "My country, Mali, is proud to host this specialised language institution of the African Union. I remain convinced that the outcomes of this meeting will contribute more to making our languages true vectors of development, integration and social cohesion in our societies that today need so much peace and security." He articulated his hopes that the outcomes of the meeting will make these languages vehicle of development and peace in Africa. He ended his remarks by again welcoming the delegates to Mali, and declared the meeting open.

The second session started with a presentation of the context of the workshop by the acting Executive Secretary, Dr Lang Fafa Dampha, who reminded the delegates of the Statutes of ACALAN that make provision for the existence of the Scientific and Technical Committee, its functions and structure, which performs advisory functions, alongside other organs.

ACALAN's triennial report covering January 2014 to November 2016, was then presented by the Acting Executive Secretary. He explained that the report focused on the establishment of its two working structures, namely the sub-regional Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions (VCLC), the National Focal Points (NFP) of ACALAN in the Member States, as well as its organs, namely the Governing Board, the Scientific and Technical Committee and the Assembly of Academicians.

The report presented the following perspectives of ACALAN, in its effort to continue fulfilling its mandate, realising its objectives and providing relevant guidance to policies favourable to the development and promotion of African languages:

- i. To be more proactive in resource mobilisation as one of our major activities. Project funding proposals have been written and presented to partners, banks, and other businesses in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility.
- ii. To continue establishing ACALAN's working structures and organs, and implement its core projects as well as transform the priority areas of its sub-regional Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions into implementable projects;

- iii. To continue harmonising the writing systems of vehicular cross-border languages, and creating terminologies and corpora for them;
- iv. To give impetus to research on African languages in collaboration with language research institutions by developing and coordinating research activities on languages and collecting and disseminating the results of linguistic research;
- v. To put more emphasis on the provision of technical support to each Member State to formulate and implement a language policy, and to establish and/or develop national structures for the promotion of African languages;
- vi. To continue on the project of elaborating a linguistic atlas of Africa;
- vii. To strengthen regional African structures responsible for culture and oral tradition, with a view to partnership and complementarity;
- viii. To modernise African linguistic tools through the use of Information and Communication Technologies thus making it possible to effectively bridge the digital divide;
- ix. To continue having teachers trained in First Language (L1) methodologies as a factor of promoting the use of African languages as a medium of instruction and as official and working languages;
- x. To continue archiving documents and establishing data banks relating to African languages;
- xi. To encourage publication in African languages by instituting and allocating prizes and awards to organisations and persons contributing to the promotion of African languages.

The report presented the following operational challenges for ACALAN:

- i. Very low programme budget, which was not released in 2015 and 2016; this adversely affected ACALAN's activities and programmes.
- ii. There has been a very slow pace of response from the Ministries of Culture or Education in the Member States of the African Union to ACALAN's request to have National Language Structures designated or established to serve as its focal points as stipulated in ACALAN's statutes; this affected ACALAN's operations especially in Member States.
- iii. ACALAN's organogram has made provision for fifteen (15) staff including 8 professional staff. However, the academy now operated with seven (7) staff amongst whom only four (4) are professional staff. Since August 2015, it has been operating with one (1) SRPO, who is also acting as Executive Secretary, one (1) Senior Programme Project Officer, one (1) Finance and Administrative Officer, one (1) Documentalist and Research Assistant and no Secretary for three months now. This situation adversely affected ACALAN's operations especially for the past 8 months.
- iv. During the last statutory meeting of the Governing Board of ACALAN in July 2015, the Board recommended that ACALAN's budget be separated from that of the Department of Social Affairs so that attention is given to certain details of its activities.
- v. The most challenging part of ACALAN's work we try to surmount is to have attitude change vis-à-vis the statuses and capabilities of African languages especially the attitudes of Africans themselves. One of the major problems affecting ACALAN's work is that language matters are not the development discourse of most African States. This reflects the lack of essential support for African languages at the policymaking level. Most policymakers put culture and languages at the periphery of their development programmes. We are therefore urging our

leaders and policymakers to render the necessary support to our efforts to develop and promote our values and cultures of which our languages are one of the main components.

- vi. The functioning of ACALAN's working structures i.e. the VCLC and the NLS, and that of the Secretariat need to be improved in terms of organisational and institutional capacity building.
- vii. There should be a closer collaboration between the Department of Social Affairs (ACALAN) and Human Resources, Science and Technology (Division of Education).

He concluded his presentation saying that cultural development is inevitably one of the main factors of the sustainable development of a people, therefore the development of African languages as the pillar of African cultures is an indispensable factor of African integration and development.

Presentations were then made by experts and representatives of ACALAN's working structures, namely the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions and the National Language Structures.

### **Recommandations:**

#### **1- On funding:**

- i. The decision of the governing board to separate ACALAN's programme budget from that of the department of Social Affairs should be implemented.
- ii. There should be a separate budget line for the statutory meetings to cover all the statutory meetings stipulated in the statutes of ACALAN.
- iii. ACALAN should approach the African Union to discuss funding issues.
- iv. The Secretariat should set up a strategy for resource mobilization, which will work on the capacity of people to raise funds should be put in place.
- v. The Executive Secretary should write letters to empower Chairpersons of Language Commissions to participate in the Secretariat's fund-raising exercise.

#### **2- On ICT**

- i. Priority should be given to the presence of African languages in cyberspace with a view to reviewing ACALAN's African languages in cyberspace project and transforming it into a programme.
- ii. ACALAN should encourage the development of a deliberate policy to ensure that African languages develop corpora so that that all translations are documented and stored.
- iii. ACALAN should find ways of collaborating with different associations and individuals who have developed corpora.
- iv. ACALAN should encourage African universities to start programmes in natural language processing.
- v. ACALAN, African language linguists, computer scientists and other relevant professionals should initiate a solid project on ensuring everybody gets access to information through availing African languages on the cyberspace.
- vi. ACALAN should identify individuals who have experience in the Microsoft localisation project and involve them in the terminology project.
- vii. As an extension of the Stories Across Africa project, ACALAN should encourage the production of animated films on African stories for African children.

#### **3- On re-orienting ACALAN and popularising its activities**

- i. The Secretariat should in consultation with the President of the Assembly of Academicians revisit the ACALAN plan of action so as to update its priorities and activities.

- ii. ACALAN should be more active in monitoring the implementation of the Khartoum Declarations and Decisions especially the Revised Charter for the African Cultural Renaissance, the Language Plan of Action for Africa and the Linkage between Education and Culture.
- iii. ACALAN should advocate for language policies that put African languages in the member states of the African Union to the fore.
- iv. ACALAN should ensure that its approaches privileged partners of African Union to advance the course of African languages, otherwise the Sustainable Development Goals SDGS may never be achieved with the languages being left behind.
- v. The AU should equip ACALAN to support the member states in elaborating language policies and implementing them in Education.
- vi. ACALAN through its focal points should go back to the African Union and ask for reform of the Khartoum Declarations and Decisions.
- vii. The Secretariat should develop a strategic communication plan that can help give ACALAN more visibility.
- viii. Focal points should make ACALAN visible in their countries and in order to attain this, the right people should be selected as focal points.
- ix. The amendments to ACALAN's statutes should be validated to enable strengthening staff numbers.
- x. ACALAN should move away from projects to programmes that can generate effectiveness.
- xi. In order to strengthen its activities, ACALAN should be transformed to become an organ of the African Union.

#### **4- On relationship between the Secretariat and Language Commissions**

- i. ACALAN should have periodic meetings with Commissions.
- ii. The Acting Executive Secretary should make a list of complaints of the Commissions so that they be revisited.
- iii. The Secretariat should intensify interactions with the working structures of ACALAN, and financially support the Commissions using the temporary assistance budget line.
- iv. ACALAN should support the Commissions to register by giving them support letters.
- v. Each member of the Commission should be given a letter that identifies them as members of ACALAN. (The acting Executive Secretary will retrieve the letter and distribute to Commission heads).
- vi. Commissions should have a global vision and not to limit themselves to a few activities only.
- vii. ACALAN should develop a plan to disseminate its work and that of its Commissions.
- viii. Language Commissions should review their plan of action and forward reports to ACALAN.

#### **5- On protecting DR Congo's 250 languages**

- i. DR Congo was advised to introduce a policy in which a child begins education in his/her mother language as this would help protect the 250 languages.

#### **6- On enlarging the Assembly of Academicians**

- i. The meeting of the Assembly of Academicians should be the next statutory meeting in view of reviving the Assembly and expanding its membership.

### **7- On harmonising the work of ACALAN with other structures**

- i. There should be coordination between the activities of ACALAN and those of other structures in the member states of the African Union.
- ii. ACALAN should make use of existing institutions in its teacher-training programme in L1 methodology.
- iii. The Secretariat should propose a framework with institutions in charge of the promotion of languages on the continent to re-establish the relationships between ACALAN and other institutions.

### **8- On building the Pan-African Centre for Interpretation and Translation.**

- i. ACALAN should with the support of UNESCO contact UN habitat for assistance in building the Pan-African Centre for Interpretation and Translation.
- ii. ACALAN should set up an African terminology data bank.

### **9- On the linguistic Atlas of Africa**

- i. The Assembly of Academicians, as one of the key organs of ACALAN should be included in the project document of the UNESCO- ACALAN Atlas of African Languages project by being selected on the Scientific Committee for the project.
- ii. ACALAN should provide a French language copy of the UNESCO ACALAN project proposal.

### **Outcomes of the meeting**

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The activities of ACALAN were reviewed taking into account its plan of action;  
Assistance was given to the Secretariat to prepare the programme of activities of ACALAN and monitor their implementation.

Recommendations were made for the revitalisation of ACALAN

**Académie africaine des langues (ACALAN),  
Bamako - Mali, 30 décembre 2016**