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ACALAN works with ECOWAS to adopt Fulfulde, Hausa and Mandenkan as its working languages

The African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), presented the way forward on the choice of a common West African Language as a working language of ECOWAS at the 6th meeting of the Ad hoc Committee in charge of monitoring ECOWAS Culture programmes, held in Cotonou, Benin, between April 16 and 19, 2012.

The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as “building blocks of the African Union” play a significant role in the process of African integration and development. This is why the African Union Commission, in close collaboration with the RECs, have initiated the “Minimum Integration Programme” (MIP), which is a set of activities, programmes assigned to be implemented by the RECs to accelerate the process of regional and continental integration. Therefore the development and promotion of African languages as a factor of African integration and development should have a place in the programmes of the Regional Economic Communities. ACALAN consequently has closely been working in partnership with the five Regional Economic Communities.

It is within this context that, in 2009, the operational workshop to launch the Fulfulde, Hausa and Mandenkan Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions was organised in Abuja in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC) have also joined forces with ACALAN in establishing, and planning the activities of the Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions in their respective regions.

Article 62 (c) of the ECOWAS Treaty manifesting the desire for the African Renaissance, states that member states of ECOWAS undertake to “**promote the learning and dissemination of a West African language as a factor in Community integration.**”

In July 2010, the Technical Committee Meeting of Culture Experts of ECOWAS, held in Bamako, Mali, gave ACALAN the responsibility to advise ECOWAS on the adoption of An African language as a working language of ECOWAS.

Taking into account the provision of Article 62 (c) of the ECOWAS Treaty, the recommendation of the ACALAN operational workshop held in Abuja in 2009, and those of the Meeting of Culture Experts of ECOWAS, that ECOWAS adopt African languages together with English French and Portuguese as working languages, and that ACALAN guide ECOWAS on the choice of an African language as working language, ACALAN has suggested that ECOWAS adopt the three Vehicular Cross-Border Languages in West Africa, namely Fulfulde, Hausa and Mandenkan. The technical aspects of adopting these languages as working languages of ECOWAS such as interpretation, translation, development of terminologies, harmonisation of the writing systems of the languages etc. would be taken

care of by the Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions. It is to be recalled that the Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions are one of the Working Structures of ACALAN. ACALAN further suggests that more language commissions be established in the future and most languages in the zone would be selected using the rotation technique.

Language being a cross-cutting issue, the use of African languages, should not be concentrated in the culture sector of ECOWAS; the other sectors of the ECOWAS Commission as well as individual member states should equally embrace it.

Adopting the three Vehicular Cross-Border Languages in West Africa as working languages is a great opportunity for the ECOWAS member states and indeed for the whole continent, because it would bring the people of the Community together thereby enhancing integration and development at regional level, because the three languages cover almost the entire ECOWAS region.

Following ACALAN's suggestion, the 6th meeting of the Ad hoc Committee in charge of monitoring ECOWAS Culture programmes recommends that:

- I. The three Vehicular Cross-Border Languages in West Africa (Fulfulde, Hausa and Mandenkan) together with English French and Portuguese be used as working languages of ECOWAS.
- II. ECOWAS adopt a progressive approach by experimenting, and continuing research in close collaboration with ACALAN and its Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions.
- III. ECOWAS give ACALAN and its working structures the means to continue research and feasibility study by sponsoring capacity building and training programmes.
- IV. ECOWAS start with the practical aspect of the exercise by providing information to passengers on planes and other public places in the three languages.
- V. ACALAN and its working structures, especially the Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions that would provide the technical aspects (interpretation/translation, terminology development ...) during ECOWAS meetings. As a pilot phase, Nigeria would experiment on Hausa, Mali on Mandenkan and Guinea on Fulfulde, under the umbrella of ECOWAS.
- VI. Member states of ECOWAS respond to ACALAN's request for the designation of National Language Structures as Institutional Focal Points of ACALAN.