EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE AFRICAN ACADEMY OF LANGUAGES (ACALAN)

The African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) is a specialized scientific Institution of the African Union. It founding text were adopted during the Khartoum Summit of the Heads of State and Government in January 2006. It has its Headquarters in Bamako, Republic of Mali. Its Host Agreement has been signed on June 17th 2009 between the Government of Mali and the African Union Commission.

It aims at valorising the African languages in making them real working languages at all the levels, in order to promote their use, to facilitate and reinforce cultural and socio-economic exchanges between the African States and therefore contribute to the realization of the African Union and the development of the Continent.

The current executive summary is developed as follows:

- History of the African Academy of Languages;
- Main activities of the African Academy of Languages;
- Partners of the African Academy of Languages;
- Challenges and Perspectives of the African Academy of Languages.

1. History of the African Academy of Languages

The African Academy of Languages owes its creation to the unshakeable faith in the use of African languages as means of development that lead the former Malian President, and former Chairman of the African Union Commission, His Excellency Alpha Oumar KONARE to propose to his peers at that time, the idea of a Pan-African structure working towards enhancing and promoting the African languages through coordinating and harmonizing activities: the African Academy of Languages.

From January to September 2001, the Mission for the African Academy of Languages (MACALAN) was established by the President of the Republic of Mali, with a view to preparing the establishment and launch of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN).

The main steps of the ACALAN establishment can be summarized as follows:

a) The scientific and technical validation of ACALAN the main step of which are:

- March 30, 2001: the Mission and the National Scientific Commission which it set up met the President of the Republic to share his vision of the Academy;

- April 2, 2001: the Mission organized a National Workshop to present the Academy project and formalize a shared national vision on Project;

- April 19 – 22, 2001: the Chief of the Mission went to Addis-Ababa, as a Special Envoy of the President of the Republic to the Secretary General of OAU to present

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the Project and define its modalities of adoption by the Heads of State and Government as a Pan African project;

- May 25 – 27, 2001 : The mission organized in Bamako an African Consultation which scientifically and technically validated the project of the African Academy of Languages, and drafted the first basic texts ("Presentation of ACALAN" and "Draft Statutes of ACALAN").

b) The Political validation

From 9 – 11 July 2001, the Lusaka Summit of the OAU Heads of State and Government adopted a the Decision CM/Dec.613 (LXXIV) consecrating the continental political validation of the ACALAN Project and on 8 September 2001, the Malian Presidency of ACALAN was solemnly established in Bamako, considered at this stage as a national structure with a Pan African vocation.

c) The legal and institutional validation

In February 2002, Government experts, meeting in Addis-Ababa under the auspices of OAU/AU, adopted the founding texts proposed by the team of the Interim Presidency of the Academy and the Task force it set up.

During the Maputo Summit of 2003, the AU Executive Council requested that ACALAN's structures be set up in accordance with the Lusaka Decision.

The establishment, in February 2004, of a Steering committee for the Implementation of the Language Plan of Action for Africa (ILPAA) in Yaounde in Cameroon, composed of eminent linguists and academics from the various regions of Africa made it possible to:

- renew, at the continental level, the enthusiasm aroused just after the Lusaka Decision in recommending among other:
  - to invite the African Union to declare the Year 2006, the Year of the African Languages;
  - to submit the project of implementation of the Language Plan of Action for Africa (ILPAA) to a meeting of the financial and technical partners.
- refine the ACALAN/ILPAA projects.
- finalize the ACALAN texts to be adopted in Nairobi by the Conference of the Ministers for Culture of the African Union.

The third meeting of the Steering committee, in October 2005 in Cape Town, with the active participation of Mrs Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African Union, H.E. Bience GAWANAS, accompanied by Professor JOHNSON, permitted to finalize the major ACALAN texts, before the Nairobi meeting.

In Nairobi, from the 10th to the 14th of December 2005, the Steering committee ACALAN/ILPAA took part in the first session of the Conference of the Ministers for Culture of the African Union, which adopted the draft Statutes and several files of ACALAN, in preparation of the special Summit of the Heads of State and Government of Khartoum (Sudan) held from 23 to 24 January 2006, devoted to Education and Culture and which adopted, among other important decision, the aforementioned Statutes (cf. site Web www.africa-union.org).

d) The international validation

The international scientific community through UNESCO which, during its 31st General Conference, in October 2001, supported the idea by voting a resolution in favour of

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the African Academy of Languages it has been supporting in all actions and solicits ACALAN for any cultural or linguistic events, through all the spaces.

2. Main activities of ACALAN

2.1. Activities of the Malian Presidency of ACALAN (September 2001- December 2005)

Given the procedural length of elaboration and adoption by African States of the legal act establishing the African Academy of Languages as a specialized institution of the African Union, Mali set up a national structure as to its functioning with a Pan-African vocation.

Let us note that the activities of the Malian presidency ACALAN permitted, first, to adopt the founding texts of ACALAN as a specialized institution of the African Union, in charge of enhancing and promoting African languages at a continental level in partnership with the languages inherited from colonization to promote the integration and the Renaissance of the continent, and, secondly, to publicize the project both nationally and internationally.

Had not been the transition from OAU to AU, the priorities of which were the establishment of its central bodies, the Academy would have been effective since the Summit of 2003.

However, from the analysis of the activities carried out and its solicitations, it can be said that the provisional Presidency of the African Academy of Languages is functional de facto, but the Academy not still being fully operational.

Following the African Regional Conference on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held in Bamako in May 2002, Mr. Adama SAMASSEKOU, President of ACALAN was elected in July 2002, President of the Preparatory Committee (PrepComp) of the Geneva phase of the WSIS.

This function of President of the PrepCom enabled the President of the Academy raise awareness, on all continents, about the ACALAN missions and objectives. The many meetings he also attended helped establish collaborative relationships with several international structures working in the field of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Indeed, from the world Congress of the linguists organized by Linguapax in Barcelona in 2002, to the Strategic Plan of the African Union Commission in July 2004, going through the Workshop of Three Linguistic Spaces organized by "Francophonie" (the International Organization of the French Speaking World) in Mexico City, the world Conference of the African linguists in the United States, the sessions of the International Academic Union in Brussels, the Conferences of UNESCO, the Council of Europe, "CONFEMEN" (the Conference of Ministers of Education) and CEDEAO on Education and multilingualism and more recently the Conference of ADEA, GTZ and UIE on bilingual Education and the use of local languages, a prime place was granted to the Academy either to chair certain activities, or to be part of a steering committee.

Within the context of the WSIS Academia Research Network, the Economic Commission of the United Nations for Africa (ECUNA) entrusted to the Presidency of ACALAN the coordination of a Thematic Network called: "African Languages and contents development in the Cyberspace". The members of this Network held their first meeting in Bamako in September 2004 and worked out a short, mid and long terms work program.

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The results of all these consultations and activities made it possible, among others, to prepare better the Accra African Regional Conference of February 2005 for the second phase of the WSIS, in November 2005 in Tunis.

In addition, the Academy co-organized with UNESCO and "AIF", on the 6 and 7 of May 2005 in Bamako, in the context of the WSIS, the thematic Conference on "the multilingualism for cultural diversity and the participation of all in the Cyberspace".

In Tunis, during the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, in November 2005, a Round Table was organized by ACALAN, under the auspices of the African Union and in partnership with UNESCO, AIF and other institutions. This Round Table made it possible, among other, to create a World Network for the Linguistic Diversity, which official launching took place at UNESCO headquarters on 21 February 2006, International Mother Language Day, in the presence of the Director General of UNESCO. Its purpose is to enhance and promote linguistic diversity as the basis of the uniqueness of human communication.

Finally, we should note the publication of a special bulletin of ACALAN in 2002 and the creation of a website in 2003.

2.2. Activities carried out by the Interim Executive Secretariat of ACALAN (2006- 2009)

The ACALAN statutes being adopted in January 2006, the members of the Interim Governing Board and the Interim Executive Secretary of ACALAN were established in their finctions on June 20th, 2006 at the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa. That same day, the Year of African Languages (YOAL) was officially launched.

The activities of the Interim Executive Secretariat of ACALAN focused on the implementation of the roadmap after the inaugural session of the Interim Governing Board (Addis Ababa, 20-21 June 2006) and those from its 2nd Session (Bamako, 5-7 June 2008) as well as those in the Work Programme validated by those sessions:

2.2.1. Les colloques régionaux sur « Politiques nationales : le rôle des langues transfrontalières et la place des langues de moindre diffusion en Afrique »

To learn more about the language situation in Africa and establish its working structures (the National Languages Structures and the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions), ACALAN committed since 2006 in organizing a series of five Conferences in the African regions, in cooperation with UNESCO and the host country of the relevant region concerned in partnership with various institutions, with the following objectives:

First, to make an inventory of fixtures of the use of national languages in all life's domains;

Secondly, to develop arguments justifying and enabling the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity. Such approach will contribute to strengthening national, regional and continental integration as well as the development of research,language planning (corpus planning as well as acquisition planning), and curricular development ;

Thirdly, to invite decision makers, on the one hand, to strengthen and develop experiences of introducing national languages in educational systems with the view of curricula harmonization, and on the other hand, to identify and coordinate networks of languages promotion;

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Fourthly, lastly, to contribute to the establishment of working structures of ACALAN.

These Regional Conferences were organized according to the following schedule:

- Regional Conference for West Africa: Bamako (Mali), 16 -18 May 2006;
- Regional Conference for Central Africa: Yaounde (Cameroon), 09 - 11 October 2007;
- Regional Conference for Southern Africa: Johannesburg (South Africa), 05-07 March 2008;
- Regional Conference for Eastern Africa: Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), 22-24 April 2008;
- Regional Conference for North Africa: Algiers (Algeria), 14-16 October 2008.

A Synthesis Conference of the Regional Conferences was organized in Addis Ababa, at the AU headquarters, from 5 to 7 February 2009.

The Synthesis Conference validated the recommendations from the Regional Conferences and identified, through the continent, the 41 vehicular cross-border languages which ACALAN will focus on in the 15-20 coming years, and more specifically the first 12 languages selected for the establishment of the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions (VCLC). There are: *Modern Standard Arabic and Berber* for North Africa, *Hausa, Mandenkan and Fulfulde* for West Africa, *Kiswahili, Somali and Malagasy* for Eastern Africa; *Chichewa/Chinyanja and Setswana* for Southern Africa and *Lingala and Beti-fang* for Central Africa.

On recommendation of the Synthesis Conference, a Regional Operational Workshop will be organized to establish the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions (VCLC); to plan the priority activities based on the recommendations from the Regional Conferences and from the Synthesis Conference, as well as from the Bamako International Forum on Multilingualism (BIFM), in particular the strengthening of research priorities as regards the instrumentation and instrumentalization of African languages, as well as issues related to the standardization and harmonization of orthographies of the concerned vehicular cross-border languages and the development of mother tongue-based multilingual Education experiences from those of the countries committed in this process; and to discuss a certain number of basic documents and issues such as the Rebuilding of the educational systems, linguistic research...

Let's note that the establishment of Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions will make ACALAN operational quickly through the establishment of the Assembly of Academicians the members of which stem from those committees and the other ACALAN bodies.

2.2.2. Celebration of 2006 - Year of African Languages (YOAL), proclaimed by the Khartoum Summit of the African Union

The main objective of the Year of African Languages was to sensitize and mobilize the African community in particular and the international community in general as regards the importance of the African languages.

As part of the celebration of 2006 - Year of African Languages (YOAL), extended until December 2007 by the AU Summit of July 2007 in Accra, to link with the Year 2008 - International Year of Languages, several activities and events were organized on the initiative of ACALAN by several African universities.

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Among the ACALAN productions one can note the publication of "Little Books for Little Hands" in the context of the ACALAN core Project, Stories Across Africa (StAAf) as well as the book on "Literacy and Linguistic Diversity in a Global Perspective " published by Neville Alexander and Brigitta Busch and prefaced by the Executive Secretary of ACALAN, Mr. Adama SAMASSEKOU.

2.2.3. Celebration of 2008 - International Year of Languages, proclaimed by the 61st Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

At the instigation of the African Academy of Languages, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union, meeting in Addis Ababa at the 9th Session of the African Union's Conference, adopted on February 2, 2008, the important Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.182(X) related to the International Year of Languages. This Decision, in addition to urge States to take advantage of this opportunity to promote and enhance African languages, through various activities at local, national and regional levels, invites member states to accelerate the implementation of the Language Plan of Action for Africa and to make the necessary arrangement to give the African languages the status of official working languages, in partnership with languages inherited from colonization. The decision also invites the Regional Economic Communities to make every effort, with the support of ACALAN, to have certain cross-border vehicular languages serve as official teaching and working languages in all fields, always in partnership with languages inherited from colonization.

Also, the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) placed the implementation of most of its activities, including the Conferences, under the banner of celebrating the International Year of Languages (2008).

The biggest celebration of the International Year of Languages on the African continent was without doubt the Bamako International Forum on Multilingualism which the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) co-organized with the MAAYA Network - World Network for Linguistic Diversity, from 19 to 21 January 2009 in Bamako (Mali) in partnership with UNESCO, OIF, the Union Latine, the Governments of Austria, Spain and Mali, the International Institutions representing the various geolinguistic areas of the world, as well as other stakeholders involved in linguistic diversity and interested in the project.

This forum had as results, the adoption of the key texts which are "The Bamako Commitment for a universal multilingualism" and its "Action Plan" together with a "Master Plan for the Partnership between national languages and the languages of the North in educational systems".

The participants in the Forum, determined to move towards the implementation of the Bamako Commitment and its Plan of Action, especially the promotion of a mother tongue based multilingual education and the reduction of knowledge gap in cyberspace through the implementation of concrete, specific and appropriate language development programmes as vehicles of the world cultures, urged countries, Austria, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Mali, Senegal, Spain and The Gambia, to mobilize, in cooperation with the MAAYA Network, ACALAN, UNESCO, OIF, the Union Latine and other partners to establish the International Commission for the organization of a World Summit on Multilingualism.

Furthermore, ACALAN attended several meetings at the international level where was recalled the initiative and the celebration of the Year, and advocated, in communications still carrying the logo of the Year, important topics related cultural and linguistic diversity in the world, the renaissance of the continent, the creation of concrete conditions for

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safeguarding and preservation of languages through the introduction of African languages in education systems ...

2.2.4 Organization of the Second Session of the Interim Governing Board (IGB) of ACALAN

The 2nd Session of the IGB held from 5 to 7 June 2008 in Bamako. The Session adopted the Rules of procedure, the Programme of Activities and the 2008-2009 ACALAN Budget. In addition, a roadmap was developed for the establishment of the permanent ACALAN structures. The ACALAN core projects were also launched.

2.2.5. Major Projects of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN)

ACALAN initiated several major projects at continental scale which are:

- **The Linguistic Atlas for Africa** : this project will make it possible to provide Africa, through ACALAN, with a multilingual documentation base on the African languages, with revised and corrected data. In addition, the designed Atlas will permit to ACALAN to produce when requested geo-linguistic maps useful for both research and teaching. A project document has been prepared and ACALAN is seeking partners for its implementation.

- **Stories Across Africa** *project (StAAf),* **based in Cape-Town, South Africa:** StAAf is producing anthologies of stories for children from birth to teens to enjoy in their own languages. Stories old and new are in the process of being collected, written, rewritten, translated and illustrated for a range of modern – day African children in rural and urban settings. This project will allow all the African children to read the same stories and tales published in various areas of Africa, to reinforce reading culture and continental integration. This project is being implemented.

- **Pan-African Master's and PhD program in African Languages and Applied Linguistics, (PANMAPAL) based in Yaoundé, Cameroon:** The aim of PAMAPAL is to train qualified linguists, language professionals, educators and other practitioners to become specialized in African languages and the application of relevant linguistic theory in the resolution of the issues and challenges that arise in the implementation of status, corpus and acquisition planning connected with the intellectualization project. So the creation of research expertise through this Programme will make easy the implementation of the other ACALAN core projects. The pilot phase of this project has started in three universities: the University of Yaounde 1 (Cameroon) and that of Cape Town (South Africa) and Addis-Ababa (Ethipia).

- **The Terminology and lexicography Project based in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania:** the purpose of this project will be to better ensure the empowering of African languages and to reinforce the process of harmonization of the concepts in a global referential terminological frame at continental level. One of the main tasks of this project is to train not only dictionaries compilers and terminology developers but also to make research, support and counselling, and provide services in theses fields in the major African languages. ACALAN is seeking the technical and financial support of its partners to develop the project document and start this project.

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- **The Pan-African Centre of Interpretation and Translation, based at ACALAN headquarters:** this Centre aims at creating the appropriate conditions for training, interpretation and translation in the AU working languages in general and in the cross-border African languages in particular. In addition, this Centre will be a centre for training in interpretation and translation in national languages, for supporting and putting in synergy with other similar national institutions. ACALAN is seeking the technical and financial support of its partners to develop the project document and start this project.

- **The "African Languages and Cyberspace" Project, based in Addis-Abeba, Ethiopia:** this project should make it possible to guarantee the adaptation conditions of ICTs to the African languages. ACALAN is seeking the technical and financial support of its partners to develop the project document and start this project.

Finally, in the number of the ACALAN activities, one can note:

(a) The holding from 09 to 11 March 2007 in Bamako, of a retreat to develop a ten-year Strategic Plan (2007 to 2012) followed by a Five Year Action Plan 2007-2011 and the preparation of project document of the Linguistic Atlas Project.

(b) The implementation of the Project "Development of Publishing and Multilingual Literate Environment in Africa (DEELMA)": Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

(b) The publication in December 2006, 2007 and 2008, respectively of the Information Bulletin No. 001, 2 and 3 in 2,000 copies.

(c) The active participation of ACALAN in the organization of the African Regional Conference on Literacy in Bamako, held from 10 to 12 September 2007.

(d) The participation of ACALAN in several meetings with international dimension, in particular:

- The various sessions of the International Union of Academies (IUA) from 2002 to 2005 as an observer member and since 2006 as an associate member. The Interim Executive Secretary of ACALAN is member of the Bureau of IUA, which held a meeting for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, from 18 to 20 November 2008, in Timbuktu.
- During the 29th General Assembly of ICPHS held in Cape Town, South Africa, during the week of 24 to 28 November 2008, the Interim Executive Secretary of ACALAN was elected President of CISPH of which he was Vice President from December 2006.
- The World Congresses of African Linguistics from 2002.
- The International Conference Linguapax International in April 2004 and those of Linguapax Afrika, in Yaounde in 2006 and Addis Ababa in 2009.
- All UNESCO General Conferences since 2001.

Finally, note that the Interim Executive Secretariat of ACALAN, attended on invitation, several meetings which offered the opportunity to build not only strong partnership relations, but also and especially to present important papers on issues related to cultural and linguistic diversity and African Renaissance.

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3. ACALAN Partners

The implementation of most activities of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) was made possible thanks to the financial support from the Government of the Republic of Mali, the African Union and other technical and financial partners such as UNESCO, OIF, Swiss Cooperation, ADEA, most recently Spain and Austria.

Among the technical partners can mention WOCAL and the International Union of Academies (UAI).

4. Challenges and perspectives of the African Academy of languages

The main challenges ACALAN is facing are:

1°) The creation of the concrete conditions for the safeguarding and preservation of African languages which are all threatened in the long term. These challenges relate to the main aspects below:

- the need of a political decision from each member State of the African Union to give back to the African languages the place and the statute which are theirs in our States, in partnership with colonial inherited languages;
- the instrumentation of all our languages through the creation and/or the development of research, valorisation and promotion structures...;
- the use of our languages in all the fields of public life, particularly in Education

2°) The contribution to an endogenous development through the use of African languages, in the perspective of the consolidation of integration and democracy.

3°) The mobilization of human and financial resources, essential to the implementation of its Programme of Activities.

4°) The building of the ACALAN headquarters.

ACALAN has among other things the following perspectives:

- The finalization of the recruitment process of the international staff (Technical and Professional)
- The establishment of the permanent and working structures of ACALAN so as to make the institution quickly operational, notably through the organization of the Regional Operational Workshops which will establish the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions;
- The establishment and/or the reinforcement of the National Structures of languages and linguistics departments in the Universities.
- the development of a dynamic partnership with all the organisations and institutions involved in the enhancement of the African languages.

The African Academy of languages is a chance for Africa, the essential mission of which is to promote and valorise the African languages in partnership with the languages inherited from colonization, of promoting linguistic and cultural Diversity, as well as Peace in Africa.

As the concrete manifestations of the political will of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union, the African Academy of Languages is the reason of a renewed hope in the African Renaissance, for the linguists, the women and men of culture and science of the continent.

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Executive Summary of the activities of the African Academy Of Languages (ACALAN)

African Union

African Union