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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

MEETING FOR THE CO-ORDINATION AND PLANNING OF THE  
COLLECTION OF ORAL TRADITIONS IN AFRICA

Ouagadougou (Upper Volta), 29 July-2 August 1968

FINAL REPORT

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The history of population settlement was a theme touched upon in several speeches.

It was also evident that countries like Nigeria, with its five universities and its institutes of African studies, possess a sound scientific structure. But lack of co-ordination has hitherto prevented the full use by researchers of the mass of documents and of studies already carried out.

It likewise emerged from the speeches made at the Meeting that knowledge of the language and environment was essential to the researcher setting out to explore a given region or theme, at least at the collection stage.

In addition, the participants agreed that neither music nor dance tunes, whose historical significance was of importance should be overlooked in the collection.

They also stressed the need for close co-operation between historians and linguists, since study of the languages was expected to yield data of value to historians.

In reply to requests from several participants for details concerning the resources made available to researchers, the representative of Unesco recalled the regional slant of the Niamey Centre and the task of co-ordination it was to carry out between the institutes and researchers.

## II. CO-OPERATION BETWEEN REGIONAL CENTRES AND NATIONAL INSTITUTES

One meeting was devoted to a practical study of the problem of co-operation between the various countries concerned, and to the selection of priority themes and regions. The following proposals were made:

1. The Niamey Centre should publish the questionnaires used in surveys; a liaison bulletin; a guide comprising lists of researchers and a regular section informing of the progress of work;
2. Establishment of a Documentation Centre for the Guinea and coastal regions (University of Legon or Ibadan).
3. Need for regional co-operation in the following two cases: the Fulani who are of concern to the Member States of the O.E.R.S., Upper Volta, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon; the Mandingos, who are of concern to the Member States of the O.E.R.S. but also of Niger, the Volta countries and Ivory Coast.

The discussions also turned on ways of expanding the co-operation already existing between certain States. It became apparent that, to enable the work to be successful, each country and each institute should submit a research programme bearing on the themes adopted by the Ouagadougou Meeting

It was recalled that the regional research projects would not replace the national programmes of the Institutes but would rather carry them further and conduce to inter-Institute co-operation and complementarity. The work of the Niamey and Legon Centres would have a regional slant and would help to develop



Mr. J. Rouch then presented an unedited document on mythology, spoken by a teacher-priest of the traditional religion, Sorko Daouda Sorko, a fisherman from the village of Siniri (Zarmaganda, district of Ouallam, Niger). The extract chosen dealt with the origin of the spirit of thunder, Dongo, of the Bariba race, and his integration by marriage in the Toru group. During the discussion that followed the showing of the film, the difficulty emerged of transmitting such a document in the rough, especially when translation was required (there being no material possibility of inserting sub-titles in it). The problem of the screening of such documents was then considered. It appeared that oral traditions might constitute a stimulus and an important source of inspiration for historical films. The discussion revealed that, in the matter of documentary films, films showing ceremonies, showing techniques and giving general information, it was necessary to review the situation. For this reason, a proposal was made to hold a seminar on the problem of audio-visual media (photographs, films, radio, television).



III. Hausa Project

Purpose:

To supplement knowledge concerning the general history of the Hausa by instituting the collection of traditions on either side of the Niger-Nigeria border.

IV. Bornu Project (Kan Uri)

Purpose:

Through co-operation between Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria, to prepare a general history of the Bornu as a complement to the Fulani and Hausa projects.

V. Songhay Niger River Project (Niger and Mali)

Purpose:

Study of the historical zone of the ancient Songhay (in particular of the Kuka region).

VI. Gourmantché Project

Purpose:

Study of the Gourmantché populations in the border areas of Niger, Upper Volta and Dahomey, traditions of their ancient abode.

VII. Korumba-Tellem Project

Purpose:

Oral traditions of the husbandmen in the regions of the Bandiagara cliff, North Volta, Téra (Mali, Upper Volta, Niger); study of the independent village of Falla-Goumtou.

VIII. O.E.R.S. Project (Organisation des Etats riverains du Sénégal)

Project submitted by Mali, Guinea, Senegal and Mauritania.

Purpose:

Study of the historical traditions of the western Fulani and the Mandingos.

After considering the problems of the forest and coastal regions, the participants put forward the following projects.

I. Priorities

First priority: The Gondja-Mandé broup, on account of the important part played by these ethnic groups in the Niger Basin.



Themes:

migratory movements of ethnic groups  
precolonial traditional relationships (political, economic, warring)  
comparative study of religious systems  
the colonial era (subjects to be specified).

D. The Western Akan - Agni - Baoulé

This project will also cover the Ashanti. Countries involved are the Ivory Coast, Ghana and Liberia. Little work has been done.

Programme: three types of activity are to be considered: collections of oral traditions, linguistic research, musical research.

Note concerning the Republic of Liberia

Studies are being undertaken concerning the MANDES.

Means: The Liberia Historical Society Incorporated, the Department of Public Instruction and the Division of Research, the Tubman National Institute of African Culture in Cape Mount, have limited means.

For each of the above-mentioned themes, the group of experts submitted to the Secretariat of Unesco a list of available researchers together with a statement of requirements for the implementation of the various projects.



fishermen  
wizards and soothsayers  
international traders (Hausa-Diula)  
musicians, "griots", story-tellers

#### RECOMMENDATION 4

Considering that lack of co-ordination and lack of resources often constitute the greatest obstacle to the utilization for cultural purposes of mass media of communication throughout the world,

Considering that the formulation of a coherent general strategy for the employment of these powerful media is imperative, especially in Africa, where little use has hitherto been made of the vast cultural potentialities of radio, cinema and television,

#### The Meeting recommends

1. that an important place be reserved for oral traditions, as inexhaustible sources of new artistic inspiration, in the African cinema, radio and television networks;
2. that a joint meeting be held in 1969 to be attended, on the one hand, by the directors of scientific research centres in Africa and the representatives of international cinema, radio and television organizations, and, on the other, by the directors of radio and television cultural programmes in Africa;
3. that every African research centre draw up an inventory of the audio-visual equipment at its disposal and of the resources indispensable to the achievement of an efficient audio-visual programme;
4. that training courses be organized, focused on specific programmes in relation with those organizations that are recognized to be the best qualified in this field;
5. that round-table discussions be held periodically to enable specialists in African audio-visual programmes to exchange information compare their experience, and draw up new projects at the national and the international level.

#### RECOMMENDATION 5

Considering that the resources both in equipment and in researchers available to each national research centre are very small,

Considering that the dispersal of these resources is an obstacle to the progress of research,

Considering that impediments to the free movement of researchers may hinder the implementation of important projects,



RECOMMENDATION 9

The Meeting recommends that governments take all steps to ensure that foreign researchers who have carried out a research mission in their country are made responsible for sending to the national research centre of that country a sufficient number of copies of each of the works published by the said researchers on the completion of their mission.

RECOMMENDATION 10  
(publication)

Considering that the question of publication is essential in the sphere of oral tradition.

The Meeting recommends that the Niamey centre collect and disseminate to all African centres and universities precise information concerning methods and cost prices for possible publications (off-set, printing of long-playing records and sleeves, multiple copies of K-7, etc.)

Recommends that African States study and adopt as soon as possible international regulations concerning copyright in oral traditions (texts, interpreters, collectors, commentators, etc.).

RECOMMENDATION 11

Considering that

- (a) the Encyclopaedia Africana project gained the approval of the two international Congresses of Africanists, held respectively in 1962 at Accra and in 1967 at Dakar,
- (b) reference was made to the Encyclopaedia Africana project by several African delegations at the 1966 session of the General Conference of Unesco,

The Meeting

- (a) Regrets that Unesco's Draft Programme and Budget for 1969-1970 contains no mention of the Encyclopaedia Africana project,
- (b) Earnestly recommends that the Encyclopaedia Africana project be included in Unesco's cultural programme and that provision be made for the relevant appropriation in respect of the period 1968-1970.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Considering that a project for a General History of Africa was drawn up in 1968 but that, since then, meetings of researchers have been concerned only with the collection of documents and with methodology,



ANNEX III

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS

Cameroon	Mr. Eldridge MOHAMADOU P.O. Box 1007 - Yaoundé
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Liberia	Dr. Abeedn JONES (Mrs.) Education Department, Monrovia
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Niger	Mr. Jean ROUCH CNRSH/IFAN, Niamey



Niger

Dr. Charles PIDOUX  
Psychologist

Mr. Djibo HAMANI  
Historian

Mr. Alfa Mossi MAIGA  
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Nigeria

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Mr. Eugene KONOVALOV  
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Centre d'Etudes Linguistiques et Historiques par Tradition Orales (CELHTO)

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