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**INCLUSION OF KISWAHILI AS ONE OF THE (AU) WORKING  
LANGUAGES *(Item proposed by the United Republic of Tanzania)***

## CONCEPT NOTE ON KISWAHILI AS THE AU WORKING LANGUAGE

### 1.0. Introduction

1. Kiswahili is one of African language which is spoken mostly in Sub Saharan Africa. Therefore, it is the language of the African Continent. It was used as a unifying language during the liberation struggle of African continent especially Southern African countries namely Angola, South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia Thus, it is a symbol of African liberation.

2. Kiswahili is the national and official language of the United Republic of Tanzania; one of the four national languages of the DRC, a mother tongue of all Comoros; and a language of business and commerce interactions along the border communities of Tanzania, DRC, Zambia, Malawi Mozambique and the EAC.

3. At the continental level, Kiswahili is one of the official languages of the African Union. It is among the fastest growing languages in the world, one of the tenth widely spoken languages in the world. It is an official language in the Pan African Parliament; is the most broadcasted African language, whereby most international radio and television stations have Kiswahili services such as British Broadcasting Corporations (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA). It is taught as a course or Programme in many universities in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. For example, in SADC Kiswahili is taught in many Universities; and it has enhanced political, economic and social cohesion and regional integration. Currently, UNESCO in its 41 General conference assembly declared 7 July each year as a global day for Kiswahili. This has marked how Kiswahili is fast- growing in Africa and the world in general. Thus, there is the need for Kiswahili to be the AU working language.

4. Being a language, which is not claimed by any ethnic groups as its own (as Africa has many ethnic groups and languages), Kiswahili has a potential role in promoting socio-economic and cultural advancement in integration agenda as well as Africa. Kiswahili is a business catalyst across Eastern and Southern Africa.

5. Therefore, this Concept Note, proposes the inclusion of Kiswahili as one of the (AU) working languages.

### 2.0. Background for the Use of Kiswahili as African Union Working Language

6. The use of African rooted languages was underscored right from the inception of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. Article xxix of its charter stipulated that “the working languages of the organization and all its institutions shall be, if possible African Languages, English, French and Arabic”.

7. The same text is reproduced in Article 25 of the constitutive Act of the Union with addition of Portuguese which was adopted later in 1986 as well as Spanish which was also adopted in 2020.

8. The first serious attempt to adopt indigenous African language as the OAU and now AU working language was made by the conference of African Ministers of Culture meeting in its Ordinary Session in Port Louis, Mauritius, from 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1986. The Ministers, noted the development of Kiswahili as a language of communication in Africa and some parts of the world and its satisfaction with utilization as a working language. Also, the Conference on the Women's Decade held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985, proposed to the Head of States and Governments of OAU now AU Assembly through its Resolution CMAC/Res.16 (1) to adopt Kiswahili as one of the working languages of the Organization. However, in 2002 a conclusive decision was made but Kiswahili has not been adopted as a working language of African Union until now.

### **3.0. Objective of Concept Note**

9. the objective of this Concept Note is to highlight the importance of Kiswahili to the people of Africa for the purpose of adopting it as the working language and lingua franca of Africa due to its history of African liberation and symbol for cultural identity.  
Rationale.

#### **i) Position of Kiswahili Continentally, Globally and in other RECs**

10. Kiswahili is among the fastest growing languages in the world, one of the tenth widely spoken languages in the world. It is an official language in the African Union and Pan African Parliament Union. One of our institutions' proposal sponsor in the region, H.E. Joaquim Chissano, the Former President of Republic of Mozambique in 2002 emphasized the use of Kiswahili continentally and globally. Although, the continental body recognizes Kiswahili as one the official languages, decision reached through a request of the then Chairperson of the region, unfortunately, Kiswahili is not a working language premises in African Union.

#### **ii) Daily Use in the Media and Education Institutions**

11. Globally, Kiswahili is the most broadcasted African language, whereby most international radio stations have Kiswahili services. These include United Nations Kiswahili Services, Deutsche Welle (DW), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), Radio France International (Paris), Radio Beijing International, All India Radio (AIR), NHK in Japan, Cairo Radio, and RVOG in Ethiopia.

12. Inspire of broadcasting, Kiswahili is taught as a course or Programme in many universities in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. Thus, Kiswahili is widely taught in different universities in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. For example, in SADC Kiswahili is taught at the University of Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe. Currently, the Ministries of Education in SADC have developed syllabi to teach Kiswahili in secondary and Primary schools and universities. For example, University of Namibia in Namibia; University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, University of Botswana, Botswana; and Universities of Lubumbashi and Kinshasa in D.R. Congo. Additionally, the institute of Kiswahili Studies

at the University of Dar es Salaam is currently collaborating with the Governments of Eswatini and Mozambique to establish Kiswahili Programme at the Universities of Eswatini and Mozambique, respectively. This shows that Kiswahili is well developing within the SADC region.

### **iii) Kiswahili Use in ITC**

13. Furthermore, Kiswahili has also built a well IT infrastructure analysis, in terms of corpus and Programme. The Kiswahili Helsinki corpus has more than 20 million words. Currently, African Language Commission for Languages (ACALAN), in collaboration with Baraza la Kiswahili Tanzania (Kiswahili Council of Tanzania) has a project of Kiswahili corpus whose aim is to build Kiswahili corpus of 50 million words. In terms of Kiswahili IT programme, there is a number of spell checkers for the language, one of which is being used by the Microsoft Morphological analyzers are used for analyzing Kiswahili corpus. Therefore, Kiswahili is one of the African language in the South of Sahara that is mostly written on the Internet.

### **iv) The Future and Development of Kiswahili**

14. Kiswahili has established firms that assures the good future and its development. There is enormous Kiswahili higher learning institutions all over the World. There is a presence of Kiswahili Councils and institute like National Kiswahili Council and the Zanzibar Kiswahili Council in Tanzania. These institutes are intentionally working to enhance the Kiswahili.

15. Apart from that, Kiswahili is one of official languages of several international organizations such as the AU, SADC and EAC. It is therefore, and indispensable tool in achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

## **4.0. Rationale of Kiswahili in the African Unity (AU)**

16. The rationale of Kiswahili in the AU is divided in to the political, security, economic and social integration aspect as follows:

### **i) Politics**

17. Common language unites people with their leaders. Kiswahili being used as the AU working language will facilitate interaction between our people and leaders within the continent and promote unity through our identity. Also, leaders will be able to interact with their citizens through historical unifying language, Kiswahili. As a regional lingua franca, Kiswahili will bring political harmonization among member states, strengthen civic literacy, and as a result consolidate nations and communities' peace and security.

### **ii) Regional Peace and Security**

18. Kiswahili is historically and principally a language of most African regions. It played a significant role during the liberation struggles as it was used as a unifying language. Kiswahili was used extensively in military training camps and during military operations. Nowadays, the language is prominent among freedom fighters and their offspring.

19. Use and adoption of Kiswahili as a working language will facilitate joint operations undertaken by African countries in consolidating peace and security in the region.

### **iii) Regional Economy**

20. Considering the quest for economic liberation within the African region, Kiswahili is expected to play a phenomenon role in enhancing consciousness of solidarity in achieving the envisaged objectives of the region. As it has been said before from its history as a language of liberation, and further from its roots as a neutral language as it emerged and grew up from languages of different ethnic groups in Africa, therefore, Kiswahili has a significant role in promoting socio-economic and cultural advancement in continental integration. It is also a useful language in business, and therefore it is a medium of communication, for supporting trade, industrialization and socio-economic transformation of African Continent. People with common language interact easily and freely in trade and business.

### **iv) Social Integration**

21. Language is the medium of communication so; it is the pillar of identity of any society. AU as a society needs a language that will icon its identity. Therefore, Kiswahili is a language of African identity. It is well-structured and easy to learn for Africans. It has grammatical and lexical resemblances to most of the languages spoken in the region so its roots belong to the region. Therefore, Kiswahili is neutral with a good relationship with other African languages. The interaction and coexistence of Kiswahili and other languages spoken in the region will enrich social integration.

22. Therefore, if developed and succeeded to ne AU working language, it will enhance social integration and diplomacy within Africa and beyond. Thus, it will fulfil responsibility of the symbol of identity, culture and custodian of our history. Hence, it deserves a role of being both official and lingua franca of our community.

## **5.0. Implications for introducing Kiswahili as a Working Language**

23. The introduction of Kiswahili as a working language of the African Union will lead to the following implications:

- i) All conference and meeting will be held in Kiswahili and facilitate the African Unity
- ii) Clear understanding of the documents will be enhanced because documents will be translated into Kiswahili; which is a language for majority Africans.

- iii) All major AU conferences and meetings, will be interpreted and translated into Kiswahili.

## 6.0. Expected Results

- i. African cultural identity will be earmarked.
- ii. Cultural rights, cultural pluralism, freedom of expression, social cohesion, and creativity improved.
- iii. African Union Agenda 2063 “the African we want” will be easily accomplished by using the Arts, Culture, Heritage and African indigenous languages particularly Swahili.
- iv) Employment opportunities among Swahili experts will be widened.
- v) Joint operations undertaken by African countries in peace and security making in the region is expected to be consolidated.
- vi) The use of Kiswahili in African Union will encourage Member States to learn and use Kiswahili for their goods.

## 7.0. Conclusion

**24.** The adoption to introduce Kiswahili as a working language of the African Union is another opportunity of upholding the importance to empower one of the indigenous African languages to assume its role in the social, economic, political and cultural development of the African continent as the milestone towards the AU Agenda 2063 “**the African We Want**”

**25.** The initiative that has been undertaken by the AU Commission to use Kiswahili in the meetings of the Heads of States and Government, and in the Pan-African Parliament is the evidence that it is possible to use Kiswahili as working language. This concept note is a result of the implementation of the roadmap of the 2021 AU Theme which states that “**Arts, Culture and Heritage: Livers for Building the African We Want**”.

26. This theme emphasizes the use of indigenous African language for promoting the language of the wider communication for AU 2002 decision with the vision of making Kiswahili as a working language I order to make the real dreams of the founders of the Organization of African Unity. It is our affectionate note that, our concept note will be put in consideration for the better future of Africa and World in general. It is the only language that we are sure will enrich cohesively the AU theme of the year 2021.

**DRAFT DECISION ON THE USE OF KISWAHILI AS AN AU WORKING  
LANGUAGE OF THE AFRICAN UNION**

**The Assembly,**

1. **RECALLS** Assembly Decision /AU/ Dec.796(XXXIV), adopted at the 34th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in February 2021, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urging the African Union Commission to implement Assembly Decision on making Kiswahili as a working language of the Union and to promote Kiswahili as a language of wider communication in Africa;
2. **APPROVES** the introduction of Kiswahili as a working language of the Union;
3. **REQUESTS** the Commission to work out the modalities for its inclusion in the next budget of the Commission;
4. **URGES** Member States and the Commission to take all necessary measures to operationalise the use of Kiswahili as a working language of the African Union in July 2023 at the latest.

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