

ACALAN OPERATIONAL WORKSHOP FOR LAUNCHING OF THE FIRST VEHICULAR CROSS-BORDER LANGUAGE COMMISSIONS OF WEST AFRICA ECOWAS ABUJA 23-24 NOVEMBER 2009

Between November 23 – 24, 2009 ACALAN launched an operational workshop for putting up the first Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions in West Africa, at the headquarters of the ECOWAS COMMISSION, in ABUJA, Nigeria. The meeting took off behind schedule, instead of 10.00 AM, it was declared open by Professor Adama Semassekou, the interim chairman of ACALAN. In his opening address, the Executive Secretary took time to thank the ECOWAS Commission for hosting the program, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Gender and her team, the Nigerian government, ACALAN partners and some distinguished personalities within ACALAN nucleus especially professor Ayo Bangbose extolling their virtues and their contribution to the growth of ACALAN. He went further to appreciate all delegates present wishing them a fruitful deliberation through the assistance of God the Almighty. After the welcome speech, ACALAN was presented to the delegates through Power Point by the Executive Secretary, Professor Adama Semassekou. He took the whole house on a journey through which ACALAN has travelled from conception, birth and infancy to the present stage. He highlighted some of its achievements, projects, challenges and other vital issues affecting the Institute. Details of this could be obtained from the ACALAN Website. (www.acalan.org)

This was immediately followed by an address from Her Excellency, DR Adrienne Diop, ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Gender. In her remarks, the Honourable Commissioner expressed her happiness and asked all the participants to feel at home at the ECOWAS headquarters. She emphasized that ECOWAS is firstly an economic community with the main objective of promoting regional integration and development, however indicating that development is not only about economic growth. According to the honourable commissioner development is not in fact reduced to any one exclusive factor. However it is always tributary to the cultures of the people concerned. The honourable commissioner went on indicating that for that reason, ECOWAS

considers culture as an essential dimension of integration for development. National languages in that perspective have an essential role to play in development. She encouraged the participants to continue working so as to give more opportunity and the means to African languages for them to participate in promoting science and technology and to become like other languages bases of sustainable development.

She pointed out that ECOWAS supports ACALAN's efforts in promoting African languages "as factors of integration, solidarity and mutual understanding, so as to promote peace and prevent conflicts."

The official languages of ECOWAS are the inherited languages from the colonial period, but the revised treaty of ECOWAS has stipulated in its article 62 that member states are engaged in promoting the diffusion of West African languages as a factor of integration.

The Honourable commissioner concluded by thanking the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) for its participation in the last ad hoc committee meeting of ECOWAS and for the fruitful work and result achieved by ACALAN since its creation. The Academy, supported by the political will of the African Union, ACALAN managed to organise high-level scientific meetings that enabled it to identify about forty Vehicular Cross-Border Languages and to retain the first 12 languages for the putting in place the Commissions for Vehicular Cross-Border Languages.

The session ended and the participants went on a tea break.

The second session started at 12.57 PM. Professor Samassekou introduced the chairman for the session, the Emeritus Professor, Ayo Bangbose who was introduced to the house as a Pan-Africanist and one of the founding pillars of ACALAN who is today one of the nucleus members of the institution.

In his speech, the chairman moved for the adoption of the programme of action. He asked the delegates to suggest credible and competent people for the Language Commissions about to be put in place. The programme was then unanimously adopted by the whole house. This was followed by the chairman

asking every participant to introduce him or herself. He then proceeded to comment on the presentation of ACALAN by the Executive Secretary, Professor Adama Samassekou, with an invitation to delegates to ask questions on the presentation and to meet ACALAN staff members on any issue they may need clarification. Some questions were raised, for example, a delegate asked if there is any forum where ACALAN reports its activities to the Ministers of Education who are in the position to make decisions concerning education instead of the Ministers of Culture.

To this question, Professor SAMASSEKO went back to the presentation to inform the house that the supreme body of the ACALAN is the Ministers of Culture and that countries operate under different situations. He took South Africa as an example in which education is controlled by the ministry of Arts and Culture. He continued to say that at the Bamako meeting decisions should be taken on the issue.

Another participant commented on the efforts of ACALAN, but was of the opinion that other professionals from other fields should be included. Yet another participant mentioned the need to determine the structure that will run the operations of the Commission in the different countries. Finally a question was asked on the relationship of ACALAN with other international bodies working on languages inside and outside Africa.

These questions and issues were thoroughly dealt with by Professor SAMASSEKOU quoting relevant documents and sections

The next item on the agenda was the presentation of the regional workshops by professor SAMASSEKOU, which lasted for almost for 20 minutes. Then professor MAGA of ECOWAS was asked to take the floor to present ECOWAS language policy, instead he passed the buck to Dr. Mamadou Gaye of ECOWAS who in turn said that ECOWAS does not have a language policy per say. He went further by saying that there is an agreement that one local language should be picked for usage in the ECOWAS Commission aside English, French and Portuguese. To support his point he cited relevant sections of the ECOWAS statute. After this, questions and comments were invited from the delegates by the chairman.

Some questions and vital issues were raised by the delegates. For example a delegate asked a question on how ACALAN is going to ensure that these national languages are used in educating our children. Another delegate asked a question as regards the future of ACALAN after the disengagement of professor SAMASSEKOU and his team.

There was a comment by a delegate on the issue of advocacy on the need to impress on our political leaders to take immediate action on national language education. He then concluded by raising a question as to why ECOWAS has decided to pick only one language.

A delegate from Nigeria asked how do we impress it on our governments to recognise and implement what has been done by ACALAN especially here in Nigeria.

To this Dr Gaye commented that no government can be forced to do anything, but as a body we can propose and recommend what should be done to these various domains.

Another delegate raised the issue of problem associated with the Fulfulde language because of the various dialects of the language. He then asked what ACALAN can do about this. Professor MAGA chided ACALAN for not participating in each of the ECOWAS meetings. He urged ACALAN to avail itself of the opportunities of these meetings with various ministers of education in ECOWAS countries and also relate with other institutions that are already in existence in West Africa.

A delegate raised the final question as to why some countries are not represented. This was attributed to communication problems. The session ended and participant went for lunch.

AFTERNOON SESSION

The afternoon session started at 4.09 pm and was opened by the Executive Secretary professor SAMASSEKOU who chaired the session. After the presentation, ~~cautions~~ *questions* and observations were raised especially on the use of

Information Technology (IT) and the involvement of the media. Again, the issue of the involvement of NKO people and the involvement of other people who are interested in the promotion of the national languages as well as people from outside the academic community was raised. The issue of, sensitisation, follow up and monitoring was raised by the delegates. The issue of language diversity was raised, since Africans do not have one common language. It was suggested that ACALAN should bring people from all over where the languages under consideration are being spoken in order to harmonise lexicons. Another person suggested the need for a database of terminologies in each of the languages. Another participant suggested the involvement of the education sector in each of the countries concerned. This session was followed up by Emanuel SAGARA's presentation of the BAMAKO International Forum on Multilingualism. The last session was the constitution of the Working Groups as a precedence of the next day's meeting.

report.

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