

PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC

REPUBLIC OF MALI
One People-One Goal-One Faith

**MISSION FOR THE ACADEMY
OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES**

**DRAFT PRESENTATION OF THE
AFRICAN ACADEMY OF LANGUAGES**

Working Document

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I. FOREWORD

This document defines the future African Academy of Languages. It proposes the guiding principles of the new structure and insists upon the necessity for African States to materialise it and make of it an Institution with a pan-African vocation.

In fact, given the political will demonstrated on several occasions at the continental level to develop African languages, Mali has felt it necessary to propose an instrument which will help implement this will: *the African Academy of Languages*.

The project of the African Academy of Languages is an idea of the President of the Republic of Mali, which has been under consideration for about ten years, and that he discussed on several occasions with his Peers. He has therefore set up a light structure –the Mission for the African Academy of Languages- instructed to work out the conditions for the creation and starting of this Academy, in relation with the O.A.U Secretary General's Office.

This institution aims at developing our languages and at strengthening African integration and unity.

II. CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION

According to recent linguistic research works, there would be about 2,000 languages (i.e. 1/3 of the languages spoken in the world) in Africa. These languages are divided into four major genetic families: the Afro-Asiatic, the Nilo-Saharan, the Niger-Congo and the Khoisan.

If some of these languages are spoken in rather confined areas, others cover much wider spaces.

It is also worth noting that, with very few exceptions, several languages are spoken in each of the countries. Yet, the great majority of these languages have no written tradition.

For a long time, African languages have coexisted with other languages from different parts of the world, mainly as the result of colonisation and commercial transactions. Those languages, which are written, are privileged simply because they are declared official, a situation which creates an imbalance of power between languages.

An examination of the linguistic situation of Africa reveals a great complexity at the levels of:

- cultural diversity;
- written and oral communication between the communities;
- functional relationships between languages with different status (bilingualism, official languages, etc.);
- individuals' and communities' participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life at both national and international levels;
- the actual building of the States within their present configuration and boundaries.

The African leaders have been aware of this situation ever since the early years of independence. They have understood very early that there could be no real development of Africa which would not make use of African languages as mediums for communication and education of the true actors of this development.

This view is also shared by UNESCO which, during its Experts' meeting in Tanzania in 1971, acknowledged that "the use of African languages in adult literacy and in school education derives from the scientifically sound finding, proven by modern teaching specialists, that knowledge is easily attainable only if transmitted through a known language, practised every day and perfectly mastered." This implies that these languages have been subjected to serious scientific research works, aiming at enabling them to translate not only the realities of their immediate environment, but also those required by any kind of world scale development.

The will to promote African languages is expressed in:

- the Charter of the Organisation of African Unity (1963);
- the Pan-African Cultural Manifesto (1969);
- the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Africa, organised by UNESCO in

- Accra in collaboration with O.A.U (1975);
- the African Cultural Charter (1976);
- the Lagos Action Plan for the economic development of Africa (1980);
- the Final Report of the UNESCO Experts' Meeting on the definition of a strategy for the promotion of African languages (April 27, 1982);
- the Linguistic Action Plan for Africa (July 21-25, 1986);

This will has sometimes been shown through the creation of institutions, projects and programs such as:

- the African Cultural Institute (I.CA) Dakar-Senegal;
- the Centre of Linguistic and Historical Studies Through Oral Tradition (CELTHO) Niamey – Niger;
- the Regional Centre of Documentation on Oral Traditions and African Languages (CERDDOTOLA) Yaoundé -Cameroon;
- the East African Centre of Research on Oral Traditional and National Languages (EACROTANAL) Zanzibar-Tanzania;
- The Swahili Academy of Languages, Kampala-Uganda;
- the International Centre of Bantu Civilisations (CICIBA) Libreville-Gabon;
- the African Bureau on Educational Science (BASE) Kinshasa-Zaire;

Most of these institutions and projects have, unfortunately, fallen short of people's expectations.

Today, given the need for democratisation of the institutions and integration of the populations, and within the context of globalisation, the advancement of African languages has now become a pressing need, hence the creation of an institution which would work in collaboration with African languages Institutions.

In fact, in the African context and in terms of languages, States have the same needs and are faced with the same problems. The insufficiency of sustainable economic performances, the inefficiency of the energies and means involved -as every country attempts to resolve the same concrete linguistic and instructional problems its own way- rightfully derive from the lack of a common and concerted language policy. Yet, African countries are characterised by wide socio-political, socio-linguistic and historical groupings which enable to identify an internal coherence and a convergent dynamics peculiar to most languages.

This is why the Academy could become an efficient tool for the reinforcement of African integration.

A closer look at the relationships between language and society reveals multiple as well as complex questions which are indeed not specific to one country.

With the exclusive use of non-African languages in teaching, education for all will remain a delusion for African states.

Furthermore, because of the illiteracy of the majority of the active labour force, the inaccessibility to information does not enable them to improve productivity, nor can they participate in an enlightened way to the building of democracy and the management of power. Such a situation inhibits creativity and jeopardises all innovative attempts.

The ongoing research works as well as those to be undertaken concern linguistics and its different connections. Some countries have had significant results which deserve to be shared with the others.

The African Academy of Languages can play an important role by boosting research on African languages, co-ordinating research works at the level of several countries, centralising and disseminating the results.

Generally speaking, states give priority to applied research whereas basic research is most often put aside. Yet, the quality of applied research depends on the performance of basic research. One of the missions of the Academy could be, within that perspective, to include this aspect of research. The Academy could also help to put an end to the isolation of researchers and ensure their in-service training. We must therefore help promote a new generation of researchers.

III. GOALS.

The African Academy of Languages aims at:

- promoting democratic and scientific culture through the use of African languages, in partnership with other languages, as means of sensitising, information, formation, mobilisation and management of power;
- contributing to the harmonious economic and social development of African countries;
- furthering African integration as a means for comprehension, peace and prevention of conflicts.

IV. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the African Academy of Languages are the following :

1. Overall Objectives:

- reinforcement of linguistic co-operation between African States ;
- advancement of African languages in general, and of languages common to several African countries in particular ;
- international advancement of African languages.

2. Specific Objectives:

- boosting of research on African languages;
- co-ordination and the development of research activities and the setting up of consultation frameworks;
- centralisation and dissemination of the results of linguistic research;
- incitement to the implementation of the results of research works;
- support to the in-service training of researchers;

- technical assistance to the different States as regard the development and the implementation of their linguistic policy, especially in the creation and/or setting up of national structures for the advancement of African languages;
- harmonisation of African linguistic policies;
- modernisation of linguistic tools through the use of New Technologies of Information and Communication (NTIC);
- use of African languages as working languages at the national, sub-regional and international levels;
- development of a linguistic atlas of Africa;
- harmonisation of instructional curricula for cross-border languages;
- filing and gathering of data banks.

V. FUNDING

The resources of the Academy derive from:

- the contributions of member States;
- the services provided by the Academy;
- the sale of the Academy's productions;
- subsidies;
- gifts and legacies approved by the Board of Governors;
- resources created exceptionally.

The Academy is initially provided by the host country with the necessary premises and equipment for the starting of its activities.

VI. STRUCTURES AND OPERATION.

The African Academy of Languages is an Institution with a pan-African vocation. It ambitions to have a linkage within national and international institutions specialised in research on languages.

The organs of the African Academy of Languages are:

- the Board of Governors
- the Presidency of the Academy
- the Language Commissions.

1. The Board of Governors is the highest authority of the Academy. It calls an ordinary meeting at the seat of the Academy biennially. However, upon the request of two thirds of its members, the President shall call an extraordinary session on a precise agenda communicated in advance to all the members. The Board approves the Activity Report, the Action Plan, and the Budget of the Academy. It elects the President of the Academy.

The Ministers in charge of Education, of Culture or of Scientific Research of the member States make up the Board of Governors.

The decisions of the Board of Governors are made on the simple majority of the members present. Each member is entitled to one vote. Should the votes be even, the President is empowered with the casting vote.

The Board of Governors shall order an audit of the management of the Academy biennially.

2. The Presidency of the Academy

The Presidency of the Academy is the organ of stimulation, management and leadership of the Academy. It is composed of

- the President of the Academy,
- the Secretary General of the Academy,
- the Director of the Documentation and Information Centre,
- the Accountant.

The Presidency of the Academy adopts its Internal Rules of Conduct. It holds a meeting once a trimester; it can convene an extraordinary meeting on the President's request who decides on the agenda of the meetings.

The Members of the Presidency fulfil permanent duties remunerated in accordance with the salary scale of African international organisations.

The Presidency of the Academy can resort to the expertise of researchers or scientifically oriented international Institutions and Organisations working on languages.

The President of the Academy.

The President of the Academy is elected by the Board of Governors for a four (4) -year term, renewable only once. He presides over the Academy. He authorises the expenditures on the Budget of the Academy and can, under his authority, empower the Secretary General.

The President of the Academy implements the instructions of the Board of Governors and is accountable to it. He appoints to the administrative positions within the Academy He represents the Academy to the administrative and political authorities of member countries, the Instances of the African Union and of other international institutions as well as well.

The President prepares the Activity Programs, the Balance Sheet and the Reports of the Academy. He attends all the meetings of the Board of Governors and is accountable for all its secretarial work.

The Secretary General.

The Secretary General is appointed by the President of the Academy on the proposal of the base-country. Under the authority of the President, he runs, co-ordinates and animates the administrative services of the Academy.

The Secretary General ensures the contact and facilitates the collaboration between the Academy and the administrative authorities of the host-country. Besides, he is in charge of the secretarial work of the meetings of the Board of Governors and the Presidency of the Academy

He keeps the archives, the minutes of the meetings and the reports of the debates.

The Director of the Documentation-Information Centre

The Director of the Documentation-Information Centre is appointed by the President of the Academy upon announcement of a vacancy. He is in charge of:

- centralising and disseminating the results of linguistic research;
- ensuring the filing and gathering of data banks;
- ensuring the translation of the publications of the Academy in cross border languages and in partner languages;
- ensuring the publication of the Bulletin of the Academy.

The Accountant

The Accountant is appointed by the President upon the advice of the Board of Governors. He is in charge of general accounting and cost accounting.

The Accountant is responsible for the bookkeeping of the Academy. With the President, he co-signs the supporting documents.

3. The cross border Language Commissions.

The Language Commissions are in charge of cross border languages of wider communication. They are composed of incumbent members, associate members, and corresponding members appointed according to well defined criteria. They have the title of Academicians.

Each Language Commission is composed of four (4) incumbent members, two (2) associate members, and two (2) corresponding members, making a total of eight (8) Academicians.

The *associate members* are well known African scientific personalities working within the Language Commissions.

The *corresponding members* are non-African scientific personalities solicited by the Presidency of the Academy to participate in the works of the Language Commissions.

Each Language Commission is animated by a Permanent Secretary elected among the incumbent members.

The Permanent Secretary co-ordinates the activities of the Commissions and centralises the results of their works for the sessions of the Academy.

The Academicians remain in their original institutions.

The Academicians hold an ordinary meeting once a year at the seat of the Academy under the presidency of the President of the Academy. Whenever necessary, an extraordinary session can be convened by the President of the Academy.

Only the President of the Academy and the incumbent members are entitled to vote. They discuss and adopt the results of the works of the Language Commissions presented by the Permanent Secretaries during the sessions.

The associate members participate to the sessions without any vote. The corresponding members can especially be invited by letter to participate to the sessions of the Academy which are relative to their field.

The Academicians are entitled to session allowances.

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