

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS  
ON LANGUAGE POLICY IN AFRICA,  
HARARE 20-21 MARCH 1997**

# **HARARE DECLARATION**

## **Preamble**

We, Ministers and Heads of Delegations representing African states at the Intergovernmental Conference of Ministers in Language Policies in Africa, organized by UNESCO with the cooperation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Francophone Agency (ACCT) through support of the Republic of Zimbabwe, having given due consideration to the views and recommendations of 51 government experts who met in Harare from 17 to 19 March 1997;

### **GUIDED**

By the 28<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference of UNESCO and the OAU Language Plan of Action for Africa;

### **COGNISANT**

Of the richness of the linguistic diversity in Africa and its potential as a resource for all types of development;

### **CONVINCED**

Of the necessity and urgency for African States to adopt clear policies for the use and development of mother tongues as well as community languages, national, inter-African and international languages;

### **CONVINCED FURTHER**

That the optimal use of African languages is a prerequisite for maximizing African creativity and resourcefulness in development activities;

### **AWARE**

That the language policies introduced since independence have generally favoured the colonial languages by setting up language structures that confer a monopoly of status to the languages of former colonial powers;

### **FURTHER AWARE**

That most of the recommendations previously made to correct this situation have not been implemented;

#### CONSIDERING

That only very few African states have clear and comprehensive language policies and that even fewer have enshrined the stipulations of such policies in their constitutions;

#### RECOGNISING

That language policy decisions are actually political decisions that can only be taken by national governments;

#### HEREBY DECLARE

Our total commitment to the realization of the following policy measures designed to correct the anomalies outlined above.

### **1. VISION FOR AFRICA**

Although linguistic in nature, these commitments should be construed within the broader context of democratisation in Africa. The policy measures stated below are based on our continental vision of the Africa we aspire to have, namely:

- (a) a democratic Africa that seeks to enhance the active participation of all citizens in all institutions - social, economic, political, et cetera;
- (b) a democratic Africa where development is not construed in narrow economic goals but instead in terms of a culturally valued way of living together; and within a broader context of justice, fairness and equity for all; respect for linguistic rights as human rights, including those of minorities;
- (c) in broader terms, Africa that acknowledges its ethno-linguistic pluralism and accepts this as a normal way of life and as a rich resource for development and progress;
- (d) a democratic Africa that seeks to promote peaceful coexistence of a people in a society where pluralism does not entail replacement of one language or identity by another, but instead promotes complementarity of functions as well as cooperation and a sense of common destiny;
- (e) Africa where democratisation in a pluralistic context seeks to produce through sound and explicit language policies Africans who are able to

- operate effectively at local levels as well as at regional and international levels;
- (f) a democratic Africa that provides the environment for the promotion and preservation of an African identity as well as the cultivation of a proud and confident African personality;
  - (g) Africa where scientific and technological discourse is conducted in the national languages as part of our cognitive preparation for facing the challenges of the next millenium.

## **2. GUIDELINES FOR POLICY FORMULATION**

- (a) All African language Policies should be those that enhance the chances of attaining the vision of Africa portrayed above.
- (b) Each country should produce a clear Language Policy Document, within which every language spoken in the country can find its place.
- (c) Guidelines for policy formulation should be sanctioned by legislative action.
- (d) Every country's policy framework should be flexible enough to allow each community to use its language side-by-side with other languages while integrating with the wider society, within an empowering language policy that caters for communication at local, regional and international levels.
- (e) A language policy-formulating and monitoring institution/body should be established in each country.

## **3. POLICY OPTIONS**

Each country/region should formulate its own policy on the basis of established needs and an informed awareness of its prevailing linguistic situation, as well [as] the language equipment of its citizens but within a general framework leading to a common vision. Such a policy should be arrived at by:

- (a) determining the correct typology of a country's language situation, and defining the statuses of the country's various languages, taking into account their functions and the media (oral, written, electronic, etc.) in which they are used;

- (b) establishing how many languages and language families there are in a given country, as well as what each is used for, who uses them, and people's attitudes towards them;
- (c) involving all concerned individuals and/or groups of individuals in the formulation and implementation of language policies;
- (d) organizing follow-up and monitoring activities at national and regional levels in conjunction with such organizations as UNESCO, the OAU and ACCT.

## **4. STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

### **4.1 *Pan-African level***

In view of the policy needs stated above, African governments should individually and collectively:

- (a) make declarations expressing clear policy statements, programme of tasks, and time-tables for implementation;
- (b) acknowledge the fact that the language issue cuts across all sectors of national life;
- (c) make use of language experts in formulating relevant language policies, state the guidelines Africa must adopt, and define the steps for their implementation;
- (d) take into account and help develop human, material and technological resources in implementing the defined steps;
- (e) re-activate the Language Plan for Africa and implement the decision taken in 1986 to make Kiswahili one of the working languages of OAU;
- (f) adopt the Pan-African Project for Training and Educational Materials Production in African Languages (PATPAL), as contained in Appendix 1.
- (g) request the OAU to take the necessary steps to ensure the adoption of the decisions and conclusions of the Accra meeting on Language in Education.

### **4.2 *Regional level***

At the regional level governments should:

- (a) monitor policies and provide follow-up activities facilitated by international organizations, such as UNESCO and OAU;
- (b) cooperate on matters of policy and resources for cross-border languages;
- (c) develop regional/subregional languages;
- (d) strengthen inter-African cooperation by having international languages taught across their zones of dominance;
- (e) revitalise African language research institutions, and facilitate the formation and continued existence of the Pan African Association of Linguists.

### **4.3 Government level**

African governments should individually and collectively:

- (a) train language practitioners in the various professions and produce teaching and learning resources including those required for second-language teaching/learning;
- (b) develop language databases and/or language banks at national and regional levels, as well as create channels for exchange of information and expertise on language matters;
- (c) establish a central language planning service or institute to serve as a formal body charged with the responsibility for language issues such as translation services and compilation of terminologies;
- (d) give economic and other practical forms of value to the languages by specifying language requirements for specific domains such as education, training, employment, and citizenship.

## **5. COMMITMENTS AND APPEALS**

In the furtherance of the policy objectives stated above, we, individually and collectively:

- (a) commit ourselves to undertake as soon as possible the adequate preparation of language policies, taking into account the fundamental aspirations of our populations, the modern technological environment as well as the requirements of international life in our time;

- (b) undertake to enhance the participation of all our national communities in the public life of our countries by guaranteeing them a hearing in whatever language they use to express their thoughts and feelings concerning public matters;
- (c) urge all our citizens responsible for public, para-public and private institutions in the area of political, administrative and social life in our countries to recognize the fundamental need to respect the right of every human being to use the language of his or her choice;
- (d) invite all international organizations, especially those involved in the areas of co-operation, education and culture, as well as financial organizations and institutions to give their support to the efforts and determination of our states to achieve development by means of dynamic language policies;
- (e) appeal to regional African institutions to give increased support both to national language policies and to regional integration;
- (f) encourage institutions and research departments involved in the initiation into and teaching of African languages to intensify and reinforce their activities in order to play a catalytic [sic] role in the global effort to achieve the development of Africa;
- (g) appeal to all concerned in Africa and throughout the world to engage in a clear and forthright co-operation, with respect for the integrity of African identity and the harmonious promotion of human values and dignity as given expression in African languages;
- (h) appeal to UNESCO to facilitate periodic meetings of government experts in order to evaluate how far the decisions and resolutions taken by this Conference have been implemented.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Pan-African Project for Training and Educational Materials production in African Languages (PATPAL)**

The project has the following four objectives:

1. A general objective which is the attainment of a critical threshold in the training of personnel and the production of educational materials in African languages. Such a threshold is one from which the use of African

languages as media and or co-media of instruction will become a normal practice in our educational systems.

2. Specifically, with regard to training this project should help develop in every country a body of professionals of various types and at all levels. These professionals should be knowledgeable and effectively operational in the teaching of and in African languages as well as in the official foreign languages.
3. Also specifically, concerning the production of educational materials, the project should help develop at the national, regional and continental levels, effective [sic] systems of production and distribution of high quality materials in African languages.
4. Finally, the project should set up an appropriate system of communication and coordination of its activities which ensure an effective solidarity at the continental level among decision-makers and professionals.

The implementation of the project at the national level will be the responsibility of competent national teams made up of professionals who are already involved in the development and teaching of African languages. At the subregional or regional level, focal points will be identified to serve as practical references of the project. At the continental level, a technical coordination team made up of highly qualified professionals will be constituted.

The administrative structure at the continental level may involve institutions such as the OAU, UNESCO, OPS, UNICEF, NGOs, and other bilateral or multilateral cooperation institutions.

Institutions such as the OAU, UNESCO, OPS etc. may be called upon to sponsor, as from now, the implementation of this project. Equally, some of the bilateral and multilateral institutions, as well as NGOs present at this conference may be called upon to also help in the implementation in the project.

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## Appendix 2

### Definitions of Terms Used in this Document

**Mother tongues:** the languages learnt by African children through social interaction with members of communities to which they are linked by parentage.

**Community languages:** dominant languages used in areas broader than their ethnic boundaries but not having a national scope.

**National languages:** strictly, local languages given national status by policy or, loosely, any local languages.

**Inter-African languages:** languages widely used across national borders [sic] in Africa, e.g. Kiswahili, Hausa, etc.

**International languages:** languages such as English, French, Portuguese and Arabic which are used for communication among people of different countries within and outside Africa.