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relating to the promotion of African languages"

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WORKING PAPER

THE UNESCO HORIZON 2000 PROJECT RELATING TO THE  
PROMOTION OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Excerpt from the report by Mr Pathé Diagne, Unesco consultant,  
on a mission to the Niger, the United Republic of Cameroon  
and the United Republic of Tanzania in April 1979.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS ON THE HORIZON 2000  
MISSION AS A WHOLE

First conclusion

All the countries visited expressed a political will to promote African languages in the fields of education, training, culture, information and communication. Governmental authorities in the Republic of the Niger, the United Republic of Cameroon and the United Republic of Tanzania indicated their intention to give material and moral support in inter-African and international bodies to the Horizon 2000 project relating to the promotion of African languages.

Second conclusion

The mission enabled the investigator to make a direct, first-hand observation of the immediate and long-term needs of the countries visited with regard to the promotion of languages in the fields of education, information, communication and culture. There is everywhere a need for training and for structures (research, training and experimentation centres, etc.).

Third conclusion

The mission provided an opportunity to gain knowledge of the projects and programmes of the various countries and the regional centres, and to identify their strong points and weaknesses. All the countries have plans, programmes and even long-term projects.

Fourth conclusion

The mission also made it possible to learn what priorities have been established and to evaluate the progress made on the projects undertaken.

(a) First priority is being given to education and the training of adults. Everywhere, efforts are being made in the direction of use of mother tongues in primary schools and of the vehicular languages for inter-communication, functional literacy programmes and, in some cases, in secondary schools.

(b) The vital information and communication sector is being neglected everywhere, principally owing to a lack of vision in considering the problems and the ways and means of solving them. Nowhere is there any coherent plan for dealing with the problem of securing qualified personnel able to prepare the necessary instruction material in a modern, scientific language.

(c) Attention is clearly being paid almost everywhere to culture. Local languages are in general use in numerous activities (theatre, cinema, literary magazines, radio and television programmes). Because of the nature of the problems involved, efforts made in this field succeed more readily than those in the first two sectors mentioned. On the whole, a very conservative and traditionalist approach appears to prevail somewhat like that adopted by the regional centres of Unesco and OAU which are concerned with the collection of oral traditions (CELTO, CERDOTOLA and EACROTANAL, etc.).

Modern African culture does not succeed in expressing itself in the creations and languages of our time. Projects do not readily manage to break

with an approach which is too often folkloristic. Exclusive emphasis is placed on inventorying and recording (collection of musical, historical, romantic, medicinal and other traditions). Very little effort is made to re-create intellectual, technical or artistic culture itself. The promotion of languages presupposes however that they will be used as vehicles of modern cultures.

#### Fifth conclusion

The countries visited showed a political will to promote local languages in education, information, culture and other sectors, in their long-term projects. However, they are all encountering technical difficulties.

The regular use of African languages for purposes of information and communication is general and even large scale. All governments use them as their real contact tool for the implementation of their projects. They all come up against the problem of the unpreparedness of staff, the insufficiency of the effort of adaptation being made by most of the languages used and the impossibility at present of using radio, television, and the written press effectively for their purposes. The Unesco Division of Free Flow of Information and Communication Policies also suffers in its projects from this lack of a clear picture of the problems, which are still badly defined by the States concerned. The problems of the modern use of African languages as an information and communication tool are still not being dealt with, even in the sub-Saharan countries where African languages are used officially. No training centre for specialists of the mass media, such as the press, radio and television, has included in its programme the relevant training of announcers, editors or journalists who are otherwise highly qualified from a technical and generally even from an intellectual standpoint. Thus the mass media which, in the policies of the African governments, are regarded as the principal tool for mass information communication, guidance and training, do not succeed in broadcasting a modern message.

#### Sixth conclusion

The choice of countries visited was dictated mainly by the existence in them of regional centres for the collection of oral and historical traditions. In our opinion, however, this criterion alone was not sufficient, having regard to the aims of the Horizon 2000 project.

The centres deal neither with the whole range of activities nor with all the problems with which the project is concerned. The countries which are in the best position to provide information under the project are those which have taken or are taking the most appropriate action to promote African languages.

While the Niger, Cameroon and Tanzania are the sites of regional centres, they also carry out essential activities on their own. They have national institutions responsible for promoting African languages with a view to the attainment of specific objectives.

Tanzania has a progressive overall policy with regard to the promotion of African languages.

Since independence, the Niger has embarked on experiments which put it in the forefront of the West African countries.

Cameroon is a representative example of the complexity of the linguistic problems faced. The quality of its trained personnel and the originality of the theoretical and practical solutions reflected in its current projects and programmes fully justify the attention which was paid to it.

Moreover, the amount of support these three states have officially agreed to lend to the Horizon 2000 project at the governmental level justifies the choices which were made. Nevertheless, the contribution in the form of information and support made by such countries as Angola, Madagascar, Nigeria, Somalia and the Sudan, because of their great interest in the subject and the scale of their current work and projects, suggests that they should be associated from the outset with the studies for the formulation and the execution of the Horizon 2000 project.

#### Seventh conclusion

This conclusion relates to the national institutions responsible for promoting African languages.

Only in Tanzania is there a body responsible for language questions at the national level, and even the National Kiswahili Committee is not very well structured for harmonizing the action of the various sectors or carefully defining the scope of each domain. Attention is focused entirely on education and training and there seems to be no autonomous and original project in the field of information and communication.

The absence, in the Niger, of any body to centralize and guide language policy was noted and discussed during the round-table meeting organized in the course of the mission.

In Cameroon, CERELTRA and the national institutions which carry out research and draw up projects function principally within the framework of the national education system or of I.S.H. Here too, there is as yet no institution organizing research and training and the production of the materials needed by the cultural, education and information/communication sectors.

#### Eighth conclusion

This concerns the inter-African institutions and the regional centres at Niamey, Yaoundé and Zanzibar. Only the first two are active at present. The Niamey centre is performing its role fully, while the centre in Yaoundé has begun an original project involving rather more than mere collection and conservation. Under the influence of CERELTRA and its researchers, who are conversant with problems of the use of African languages in education in particular, CERDOTOLA, with its plans for thematic glossaries, has undertaken a programme of adaptation to modern life.

By and large, the regional centres can take part in an effort to promote languages in a modern context only if they broaden their present scope.

#### Ninth conclusion

This conclusion relates to activities of the different sectors of Unesco. The measures taken by the Sector of Culture and Communication (and especially its Division of Cultural Studies) are noteworthy. However, the Sector seems to have done more to conserve what exists (transcription, collection, etc.) than to promote a modern culture expressed in African languages (translation of contemporary foreign publications, promotion of literary work, film, radio and television production, etc.) that is in keeping with the times.

The Education Sector shows that there is undoubted interest in the question of languages. However, there is still no coherent plan of action that responds to the requests and needs that are being expressed in increasingly pressing and specific terms by states, especially in relation to the fields of research, training and experimentation.

Despite the considerable scope of and the major role played by African languages in the field of information, the sections responsible for communication do not yet seem to have fully understood all the aspects of this problem.

It is not possible, in the absence of specific terms of reference, to evaluate, and still less to draw conclusions concerning the work of the other sectors and divisions. The human sciences, literacy programmes, the natural sciences and technology, all pose key problems in relation to the use and promotion of African languages, if only as far as better knowledge of African societies and cultures or better methods of transferring knowledge and technology for development are concerned.

#### Tenth conclusion

Unesco lacks the structures needed for the realization of the Horizon 2000 project for the promotion of African languages. This calls for more than a body that co-ordinates the activities of different sectors, or the existence, simply, of a more or less permanent working group or task force. It requires an independent section responsible for its own policies and actions, which would co-operate with the different sectors while having its own fields of action, as the promotion of African languages in education, information, communication and culture poses completely new and specific problems.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION UNDER THE HORIZON 2000  
PROJECT RELATING TO AFRICAN LANGUAGES

First proposal

A working group should be set up at Unesco to study the information furnished by this mission and the problems which the Horizon 2000 project presents for each department or division. Notes derived from this report and forwarded to certain departments, as well as briefings with the heads of divisions, may serve in each case to prepare the main lines of inquiry or action. The consultant is at the disposal of the sectors concerned.

Second proposal

The present investigation should be followed up by a mission that would visit a larger number of countries or liberation movements which, because of the scale and originality of their work to promote African languages, should from the start be associated with the project at the governmental level. The criteria for their selection should be simple and include, in particular, the use made of African languages in schools or training establishments and in the national administration. In this connection there immediately came to mind the governmental decisions and the work now being done in Nigeria, Angola, Madagascar, Somalia, and within the ANC, to mention only a few specific examples.

Third proposal

The results of the mission should be supplemented by a study of non-African countries which have recently tried out a policy of cultural revival and of promotion of national languages. This is specially important with reference to the strategy of adapting the African continent's languages to the modern world. This proposal takes up a suggestion made by Mr Makamgiansar, who considered that the present inquiry should be carried out by at least two consultants, a specialist in the human sciences and a specialist in the natural sciences or in the sciences which are based on observation. It would be desirable for them to be bilingual experts speaking at least French and English.

Fourth proposal

Upon completion of the inquiries and the meetings of working groups and of experts, a draft project should be drawn up on the basis of the conclusions arrived at in these meetings.

Fifth proposal

An exchange of views should be held between the states concerned, the departments of Unesco and qualified experts for the purpose of formulating a Horizon 2000 project that would be detailed as to content and the timing of action in the short, medium and long terms. This project would serve as the basis for Unesco action, and for moral, financial and material support to be given by the Organization to states and institutions and to projects carried out in this field. This proposal could be implemented in two stages:

- (a) meeting of consultants, experts and Unesco officials concerned and drawing up of a draft project;
- (b) participation of governmental authorities in order to finalize the project.

Planning of the implementation of the proposals

Proposal 1 concerning the Unesco working group can be put into effect immediately on the basis of this report and individual communications sent to certain sections.

Proposal 2 relating to the extension of the exploratory inquiry to other countries can be put into effect in the very short term, which is desirable if proposal 4 concerning the draft project is also to be implemented in the very short term.

Proposal 3 relating to the securing of information on non-African activities can also be carried out in the short term, in the context of the preliminary investigation of the technical problems of adapting to modern conditions and the strategy for linguistic development.

Proposal 4 concerning a meeting to draw up a draft project or a final project would first require the conduct of preliminary inquiries by the French- and English-speaking consultant(s), leading to a set of conclusions and proposals to be set out in document.

This document can either constitute a draft project for submission to governmental and non-governmental experts or, if the necessary requirements are met, lead directly to a final Horizon 2000 project for action on African languages with its programmes for operational research and experimentation work and for the establishment of a special or other fund for financing and co-financing in association with the requesting states and the institutions and bodies concerned.

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