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ACALAN provides inputs on the use of African languages as working languages of ECOWAS.

The Ad Hoc Committee in charge of monitoring ECOWAS Culture programmes, met in the economic capital of Benin, Cotonou, from 16 to 19 April 2012. Following the recommendations from the Operational Workshop to launch the Fulfulde, Hausa and Mandenkan Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions, organised in Abuja in November 2009, and those from the Technical Committee Meeting of Culture Experts of ECOWAS, held in Bamako, Mali, in July 2010, on the use of African languages as ECOWAS' working languages together with English, French and Portuguese, the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), was invited to provide the necessary inputs for the implementation of the recommendations.

It is to be noted that the recommendations referred to above were informed by article 62 (c) of the ECOWAS Treaty that urges the member states of ECOWAS to “**promote the learning and dissemination of a West African language as a factor in Community integration.**” ACALAN has also suggested that the technical aspects pertaining to interpretation, translation, and the development of terminologies be taken care of by the Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions, which are one of its Working Structures. ACALAN has further suggested that as more language commissions are established, more languages in the ECOWAS zone be selected using the rotation procedure

Considering that language is a cross-cutting issue, the use of African languages as ECOWAS' working languages, should not be the concern of the culture sector of ECOWAS alone; the other sectors of the ECOWAS Commission as well as individual member states should equally embrace it. Adopting the three Vehicular Cross-Border Languages in West Africa as working languages is a great opportunity for the ECOWAS member states and indeed for the whole continent, because it would not only bring the people of the Community together thereby enhancing integration and development at regional level, because the three languages cover almost the entire ECOWAS region, but it would also ensure that deliberations from the ECOWAS Secretariat reach the vast majority of the citizenry in the fifteen member states.

Following ACALAN's suggestion, the 6th meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee in charge of monitoring ECOWAS culture programmes has recommended that:

- I. The three Vehicular Cross-Border Languages in West Africa (Fulfulde, Hausa and Mandenkan) together with English French and Portuguese be used as working languages of ECOWAS.

- II. ECOWAS adopt a progressive approach by experimenting, and continuing research in close collaboration with ACALAN and its Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions.
- III. ECOWAS give ACALAN and its working structures the means to continue research and feasibility studies by sponsoring capacity building and training programmes.
- IV. ECOWAS start with the practical aspect of the exercise by providing information to passengers on aeroplanes and in other public places in the three languages.
- V. ACALAN and its working structures, especially the Vehicular Cross-Border Language Commissions would provide the technical aspects (interpretation/translation, terminology development, etc) during ECOWAS meetings. As a pilot phase, Nigeria would experiment on Hausa, Mali on Mandenkan and Guinea (Conakry) on Fulfulde.
- VI. Member states of ECOWAS respond to ACALAN's request for the designation of National Language Structures as Institutional Focal Points of ACALAN.



African languages are the anchor of our shared valued