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## Communique on the workshop for the Harmonisation of the Writing System of the Ewe, Soninke and Songhay vehicular cross-border languages

### Introduction

The African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), in collaboration with the Centre for Historical Studies by Oral Tradition (CELHTO), and the KARANTA Foundation, organized a workshop for the harmonization of writing systems of the Ewe, Soninke and Songhay vehicular cross-border languages, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 11 to 13 March 2020.



The objectives of the workshop were to:

- i. Harmonize the differences in orthographic practices;
- ii. Create a common alphabet and writing systems for the languages;
- iii. Develop a standardized form of writing for each language;
- iv. Develop a minimum lexicon for each language;
- v. Develop harmonized grammar rules;
- vi. Discuss the strategies and means of making available and disseminating the available harmonized rules.

The workshop brought together, members of the three vehicular cross-border languages, the President of ACALAN's Assembly of Academicians, staff of the ACALAN Executive Secretariat, as well as the Permanent Secretary for the Promotion of National Languages and Citizenship Education representing the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages of the Republic of Burkina Faso (MENAPLN).

The Executive Secretary of the African Academy of Languages, Dr Lang Fafa Dampha reminded members of the Vehicular Cross-border Languages Commissions of the need to work with National Language Structures. He urged countries that share the same languages to work together to empower their languages by effectively harmonizing the writing systems of the languages. He said that the role of National Language Structures as national institutional focal points is to represent ACALAN in their respective countries in all language matters in collaboration with the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions. He invited and urged them to continue to act as Ambassadors of ACALAN, to report faithfully, and to work to ensure that ACALAN's objectives are realized.

The President of the Assembly of Academicians of ACALAN Professor Sammy Beban Chumbow, presented the importance of the harmonization of writing systems of African Languages and the role of the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions, (VCLC). He clarified the concepts of *cross-border* and *vehicular languages* by giving the difference between the two categories. He also highlighted the characteristics of vehicular cross-border languages, the criteria for their identification, and the role and functions of the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions. Professor Chumbow also presented the status of “mega” languages such as IsiZulu in South Africa, Sango in the Central African Republic, and Igbo in Nigeria in ACALAN's work.

Members of the three Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions presented their respective country reports on harmonization of the writing systems of the three vehicular cross-border languages: Ewe, Songhay and Soninke, in each country. The presentations were structured in the following three parts: what is done; the current state of affairs; and what remains to be done (the perspectives).

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Following the various presentations, it emerged that the Ewe, Soninke and Songhay vehicular cross-border languages have different spelling rules according to the variants of the languages spoken in different regions of the country, and that the writing systems are governed by the legislation of certain countries.

On the second day of the workshop, March 12, the participants joined their respective commissions to work on the harmonization of the writing systems of their languages.

The following are the outcomes of the workshop:

- i. The differences in orthographic practices, harmonized;
- ii. A common alphabet and writing systems for the languages, created;
- iii. A standardized form of writing for each language, developed;
- iv. A minimum lexicon for each language, developed;
- v. Harmonized grammar rules, developed;
- vi. Strategies and means of making available and disseminating the available harmonized rules, discussed.