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# Concept Note

**The Role of African Languages, Oral Traditions and Cultures in Combating the Pandemic of COVID19**

**Proposed date, 15 September 2020**

**ACALAN/CELTHO**

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## Introduction

African countries have invested enormous resources on health both in terms of human and financial. However, the efforts are not commensurate with the outcomes, because malaria and other environmental borne diseases still ravage Africa. This has led to a growing concern that the progress of Sub- Sahara Africa in its march towards achieving the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals 2015, of the United Nations was considerably slow and it have continued to lag behind all other regions of the world. The African Union is working hard to realise the objectives its Agenda 2063, especially goal three (3) of Aspiration one (1)<sup>1</sup> of the Agenda.<sup>2</sup>

Just like the outbreak of previous pandemics, the whole world was taken aback by the outbreak of the Coronavirus disease commonly known as Covid19 that began in Wuhan, China in December 2019. So far, Africa is still being the least affected by the pandemic going by the statistics available.

However, the virus has spread to dozens of countries within weeks, and now to all African countries. Governments and health authorities in Africa are working very hard to limit the spread of infections.

Notwithstanding, new cases are reported in all parts of Africa every day now. The Covid19, pandemic has claimed thousands of lives and tens of thousands of others were infected.

Clinically, a lot of progress has been realised in curtailing the pandemic, but socially the message does not seem to get across to everyone. Several steps have been taken to address this seemingly intractable health problem. A lot of effort has been made in terms of material and human resources but, the problem persists and cases are on the increase and seemed obdurate. A closer look at the modes of transmission of the disease and the nature of its spread in Africa reveals that many factors underlie its spread, including poverty, food insufficiency, social problems, lack of information, among others.

In order to curtail the spread of the disease and to strengthen sensitisation on preventive methods as well as surveillance campaigns on the disease in Africa, there is a great need for the participation of the vast majority of Africans. This can only be realised through the use African languages that these majority of Africans (about 60%) use uniquely or essentially, to avoid unwittingly marginalising and excluding them in the process. The use of African languages which will enhance the participation of the majority of Africans, will further help to effectively check the rate of infection of the disease. Therefore, there is a need for health workers and volunteers to use African languages in order to communicate effectively with the people.

In addition to the importance of using African languages for awareness-raising, emphasis should be placed on the involvement of endogenous actors such as traditional communicators, notables, traditional chiefs as well as the gender concept.

Also, the greatest challenge for the management of the pandemic in Africa remains the precarious socio-economic situation of the majority of its population, who are much more

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<sup>1</sup>Aspiration 1: A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, Goal 3: Healthy and well-nourished citizens - expanding access to quality health care services, particularly for women and girls;

<sup>2</sup>Goal 5: to improve maternal health; Goal 6: to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; and Goal 7: to ensure environmental sustainability;

concerned about their economic survival than about preventive measures against the virus. Therefore, relying on locally available will help protect against the virus by strengthening the immune system through good nutrition at hand.

In view of the above, the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) and the Center for Linguistic and Historical Studies through Oral Tradition (CELHTO) are organizing a teleconference on the role of African languages, oral traditions and cultures in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in Africa.

## **Objectives**

The webinar aims to:

- To create a platform for discussion on the role of African languages, oral traditions and cultures in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic;
- To sensitize Africans on the role of endogenous cultures, of which African languages are the major pillar, in prevention methods;
- To identify the main challenges Africans face in using their own cultures and languages in their education and awareness programmes;
- Make proposals regarding best practices on preventive measures in combatting the Coronavirus pandemic in Africa;
- Support the commitment of Member States to achieve the endeavour of the Africa Centre for Disease Control (CDC) on behalf of the African Union in combatting the Coronavirus pandemic in Africa;
- Present the ACALAN sensitisation videos in African languages;
- Present CELHTO publications that can support the endogenous approach in the fight against the pandemic;
- Produce and disseminate recent findings on the Covid 19 prevention, and new opportunities in the languages spoken in Africa;
- Establish a means of disseminating information to the rural population through health workers and practitioners, the media and traditional communicators;
- Publish the proceedings of the webinar in a report as a reference for use in future sensitisation and prevention programmes.

## **Expected outcomes**

- A platform of discussion on the role of African languages in combatting the Coronavirus pandemic created;
- Africans sensitised on the role of endogenous culture, of which African languages are a major component, in preventive methods;
- The main challenges facing Africans in using their own cultures and languages their programmes of education and sensitisation identified;
- A proposal is made for best practices on preventive measures in the fight against the Covid19 pandemic in Africa, taking into account African languages and cultures;
- The commitment of Member States to achieve the endeavour of the Africa Centre for Disease Control (CDC) on behalf of the African Union in combatting the Coronavirus pandemic in Africa, supported;
- ACALAN awareness videos in African languages and CELHTO publications that can support the endogenous approach in the fight against this pandemic are presented;

- Recent findings on Covid-19 prevention and new opportunities in languages spoken in Africa are produced and disseminated;
- A means of disseminating information to the rural population through health extension workers, practitioners and the media as well as traditional communicators is established;
- The proceedings of the webinar in a report as a reference for use in future sensitisation and prevention programmes, published.

## **Methodology**

A two or three-hour webinar that will include the following activities:

- Presentation on the role of African languages, oral traditions and cultures in the fight against Covid 19;
- Statement by the speakers on the role of African languages, oral traditions and cultures in the fight against COVID19;
- Discussions on methods to raise awareness and prevent the spread of Covid 19;
- Presentation of a paper on Language and Culture in Disease Prevention;

## **Participants**

Participants will include:

- Representative of the Department of Social Affairs;
- ACALAN Executive Secretary
- CELHTO Coordinator
- ACALAN's dent of Assembly of Academicians,
- ACALAN and CELHTO programme officers and
- members of ACALAN and CELHTO working structures, bodies and research associates.