



CONCEPT NOTE
SCIENTIFIC REVIVAL DAY OF AFRICA 2023
CONFERENCE THEME: LANGUAGES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN
KENYA

DATE: OCTOBER 18, 2023

VENUE: NAIROBI SAFARI CLUB

1. Introduction

The Kenyan constitution, Chapter 2, Section 7(3), recognizes culture as the foundation and civilization of the Kenyan Nation and people. It also emphasizes the role of science and indigenous technologies in the development of the Kenyan nation and guides that the state shall develop, promote, and protect the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya. Further, the constitution suggests measures to be implemented which include: The promotion of all forms of national and cultural expressions; promotion of intellectual property rights of the people of Kenya, promotion and protection of the diversity of languages of the people of Kenya; promotion of the development and use of indigenous languages and promotion for the development of cultural industries.

Moreover, the framers of the constitution must have observed that Kenyans had long been separated from their cultures and languages and thus separated from themselves. The writers could also tell that indigenous languages and cultures in Kenya were endangered. The constitution's writers envisioned Kenyan people developing a strong sense of self. They thought constitutionalizing and thus protecting indigenous languages and cultures would herald the beginning of national self-determination and separation from imperialism. It would also symbolize resistance to imperialism and decolonization. Their reasoning factored in the power of language as an expression of a people's thoughts, ideas, soul, and culture. In addition, the writers of the constitution could see the hegemonic control those European languages had over the Kenyan people. This hegemony represented a people disconnected from the ways of their ancestors and gave low prestige to non-European languages and cultures.

Thus, this conference hopes to lend to the rebirth of indigenous languages and cultures in Kenya. This renaissance would recognize language and culture as the most valuable things left in the old homestead that must be urgently fetched. This conference hopes to encourage people to blend the modern ways of living with traditional ways of existence such as traditional philosophies, medicine, foods, cooking methods, birthing methods, relationship ideals, architectures, and mourning styles.

Scholars, at the conference, will sit and reminisce about the things we lost in the fires, past. Kenyans also lost huge granaries and libraries of indigenous knowledge as there has not been a deliberate transfer of knowledge because of language barriers.

This conference is also inspired by Audre Lorde's caution that, the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," the "master's tools" here is a metaphor for any form of cultural imperialism and homogeneity.

Since the academy is to aid in the achievement of SDGs in Kenya then the academy has to be inclusive and tap knowledge from social sciences. This is because social sciences are often overlooked in national development conversations- to the detriment of this very important conversation. Thus, there must be deliberate inclusion, celebration, and elevation of the place of social sciences in driving the SDG conversation.

To the naked eye, this conference seems like a space curated for mourning Kenya's glorious past. It is not the case as it also intends to move the conversation from pre-colonial, -colonial to modern and post-modern linguistic vis-avis development concerns. This includes the language education policy that suggests educating children using indigenous language up to grade 3. This will fit snug under the sub-theme: Language, Culture, and Decolonization of Education in Africa. The conference will also host deliberations on Swahili being the national language but not widely used and well mastered. It will also host conversations on youth languages like Sheng and Eng-Luo. The conference will encourage conversations about how other languages like English have evolved, grown, and changed under novel technologies such as social media. Lastly, this conference will broach the idea that language and language use have influenced both development and the quality of life that Kenyans experience.

Moreover, the conference anchors itself on SDGs as the lens to study development. They will be viewed as those goals that African governments pursue to enhance the well-being of their citizens. The SDGs will be inextricably linked to indigenous languages and cultures. This is because studies have linked SDGs like low socioeconomic status, poor health access, and illiteracy to the lack of information in indigenous languages.

Whatever the interpretations might be, the digitalization of society and its technological transformation; attempts to look at the past to design a better future are the issues that stand at the heart of this conference which seeks to provide a forum where the international community of scholars and researchers can reflect on and debate challenges related to three interconnected sub-themes:

- i. Language, Quality of Life and Sustainable Development

- ii. The Role of Social Media in Linguistic Evolution and Transition
- iii. Language, Culture, and Decolonization of Education in Africa

2.0 Expected outcomes

- i. Report proceedings
- ii. Develop policy briefs
- iii. Evidence on challenges in national development and the challenges facing the country on the use of different local languages.

3.0 SRDA 2023 Local Organizing Committee

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