

BI-LINGUALISM, INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION

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ABSTRACT

Integration is a phenomenon that has gained ground among development experts, academics, professionals and the likes the world over including the West Africa Sub-region. The phenomenon is anchored on the need for development based on the diverse potentials of all countries in the region. The paper argues that the various components of the region are naturally endowed along their life zones and that it has participated in the transformation of its economy in the past through its capacity and ability to gain control over its environment. Along the path there was a dislocation and disconnect which brought about poverty and other features of underdevelopment. To re-enact development for the region, the paper posits that knowledge, growth, capacity and so on are parts of the components of development that are required in the process of deliberate transformation of a society by a conscious people. In effect, development and how it is attained is about 'people'. Finally, the paper concludes that the removal of the dislocation and disconnect between West African Countries based on Zikist philosophy of the New Africa is fundamental to the desire and attainment of development. However, the driving factor of the entire process is the language that reflects the culture and totality of the way of life of West Africans. For the development to be sustained beyond the present generation therefore, the people must connect to the next generation through the instrumentality of language as a preservative, the culture as a reservoir of ways of life that shapes the direction or path of desired development over time.

Keywords: Language, Knowledge, Culture, Development, Integration.

INTRODUCTION

International relations and development seem to revolve around language as a facilitator of trade and integration. But the extent to which language plays critical role in defining and determining the tempo of regional integration has not been fully explored. Notwithstanding, there continues to be the organisation of thoughts around how language disparities can be explored to enhance trade and development. The article, making use of the West African sub-region, inquires into the establishment of certain preconditions and fundamentals that are important to using trade to facilitate integration and development.

Africa is generally an array of political systems in which several languages thrive. At the official level, Africa, especially following the independence of the 1960s, came to inherit colonial languages which have not only become entrenched as official languages, these languages remain as well the standards shaping the application and use of science. There is what can be rightly described as a science of language. We need not however go into this in the article. It still, nevertheless, has its implication for the purpose of the article. This is because the West African sub-region provides opportunity for the study of the effects and consequences of bi-lingualism on integration and development. This urgently compels the clarification of the broad concept in which the entire study revolves around. And this is the concept of development.

Development is a state of being whereby society has transcended above certain barriers or obstacles to human comfort and existence through the conscious manipulation of internal resources and ability to cope with external influences. (Alliyu 2013). As a process, development will mean the various internal mechanisms consciously put together or harnessed by the people over a period such that it causes transformation of the society from a state to another which can make it definable as 'developed'. The transformation however must have evolved institutions to maintain the 'developed' state of being (Alliyu 2013).

For Akanle 2014, Akanle and Adebayo, 2013, development can be seen as improved health, enhanced life chances, improved social status, and improved income level, increased access to justice, more balanced gender relations and substantially improved capacity to be the best one can be without unnecessary socio-cultural, political and physical impediments. While Alliyu gave an abstract definition of the concept of development and its processes, Akanle simplified the meaning and process of development in concrete and measurable terms. The outcomes of both definitions are more importantly the same because 'removal of barriers or obstacles to human comfort simply means improving all aspects of the society from health, education, income, justice, life chances and so on as identified by Akanle. Consequent upon the above, development cannot be seen as a natural phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that happened to conscious people by a deliberate plan of action to attain it. It is not like 'growth' which may occur almost without human interference. This is not however to say that pattern of growth cannot be influenced by man. The point being made here is that development cannot be attained by a people who are not conscious and desirous of it. Knowledge, growth, capacity and so on are parts of the components of development that are required in the process of deliberate transformation of a society by a conscious people.

In effect, development and how it is attained is about 'people'. The question this article intends to address will therefore include who are the people of West African sub-region? What is their plan to develop? How can they integrate in spite of different languages spoken in the sub-region, issues and problems in theory in the question for integration shall also be discussed.

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IN THEORY

Important to the article are critical issues and problems in the theory of regional integration and development. To what extent can bi-lingualism limit the integration and development of the West African sub-region? There is the further question/issue of being able to predict the degree of the effects and consequences of bi-lingualism on the integration of the West-African sub-region. The prediction needs be based on concrete and empirical determination of the indices of measurement and analysis. To what extent can the indices be specifically formulated to serve the research desire as indicated? This no doubt raises further complex issues and problems. What policies that can be formulated to reduce language barriers between and among West-African citizens and residents? Should the policies be tailored toward reducing to the bearest minimum the problems arising from appropriate interpretations as interpreters try to offer their assistance, or should the integration target policies aimed at reducing the problem of cultural contacts? Increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT) no doubt provides the framework through which language differences arising from cultural contacts are reduced to the bearest minimum. But has the sub-region developed technologically? This raises additional problem/issue relating to the determination of the relationship between technology and society in this contemporary age of globalisation. The discourse on the connection between language and regional development should therefore preoccupy itself with the whole of the issues and challenges of development under debilitating conditions.

How can language differences be overcome means further how prepared West-Africans are to disallow the effects and consequences of colonial legacies on interactions especially in the areas of trade and development. Accepted that there were (and still are) agreements within the framework of Economic Community of West-African States (ECOWAS) and between and among individual states in the sub-region to facilitate trade and development, the fact still remains that trade between and among them is still very low. Generally, they produce, distribute and consume among themselves products that are internal to one another. However, the gas supply from Nigeria provides hope of better relationships notwithstanding the fact that Ghana has recently discovered oil. New studies on regional integration and development should, as a priority, be fashioned to enquire into how language, culture and inherited systems of government play critical role in the facilitation or otherwise of the drive towards sustainable development.

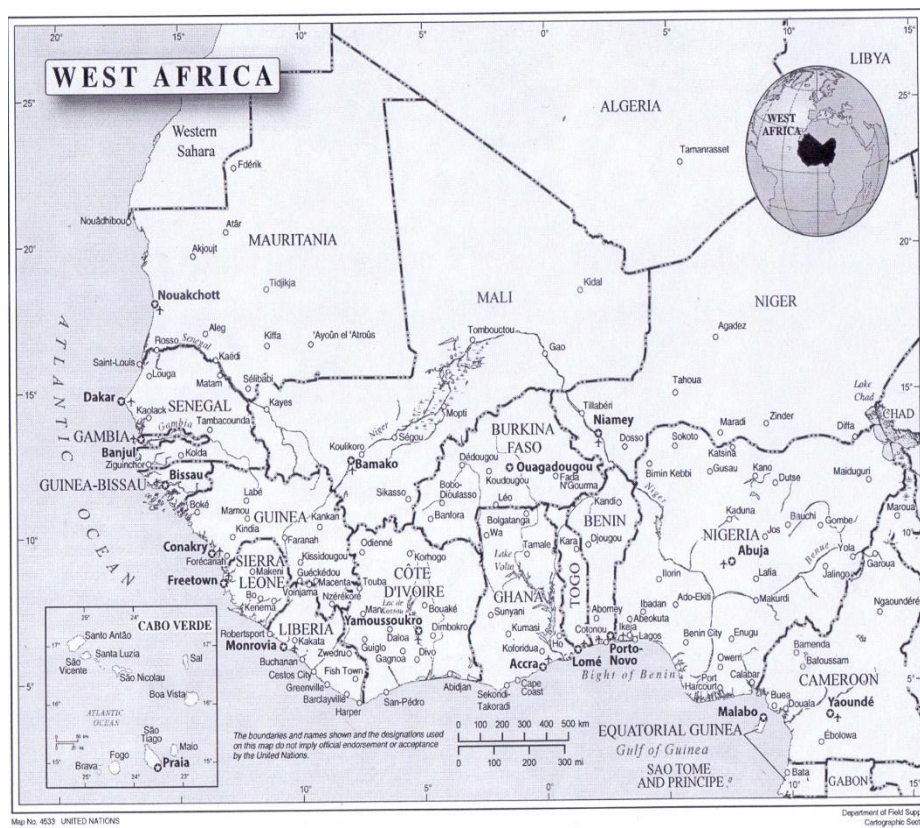
THE PEOPLE OF THE WEST-AFRICAN SUB-REGION

Central to the concept and process of development is the 'people'. Therefore any development that does not revolve around the people cannot be described as genuine development. Consequently, the development of West African sub-region must be about the people of West Africa by West Africans and for West Africans. The West African people are naturally located within three "Life Zones" which is an area that has its own distinctive terrain, climate and vegetation. According to Falola and Adebayo (1985), there are three life zones, which are: the Coastal Strip, the Forest and the

Sudan Savanna. It is an area that ‘lies between the Southern edge of the Sahara Desert in the North and the Atlantic Ocean in the South, and between the Eastern Atlantic Ocean in the West and Lake Chad in the East. There is a basically major difference in the West-African people’s geography, economy, political organisation, culture and so on based on the features of each life zone’s in the region.

What is however common to all is the fact that ‘the way in which people live is affected by the area into which they are born’. The people of the Sudanic Zone include; the Wolof, Tukolor, and Fulani; the Soninke, Malinke and Bambara (Mende speaking people); the Sanghai, the Hausa and the Kanuri. The people of the Forest Zone are; the Mende, Temne and Kru; the Banle, Asante, Fon, Yoruba, Edo and Igbo. The people of Costal Zone are: the Yola, Pepel and Serer of Senegambia; the Sherbro and Bulom of Sierra Leone, the Guan of Southern Ghana, the Ijo of the Niger Delta and the Kru of Liberia.

There are at least about sixty major ethnic groups in West Africa (Falola and Adebayo 1985). The African continent can boast of the possession of many languages. For example, Kenya has 39 languages; Uganda and Ghana have 22 each. Forty Six (46) languages are spoken in Tanzania, Ethiopia and Eritrea all together has 76. Zaire alone has 326 languages while Nigeria, Cameroon and Sudan have about 200 languages each, (Njoku, 2012). The major challenge in the context of this discussion therefore is how can all these diverse languages and varied cultures be harmonised to remove barriers to human comfort or bring about development? Njoku queried further that if language is a mirror of culture that holds the memory bank of the people, can an authentic African reality be communicated in a foreign language? In all situation of extreme diversity, is development possible or achievable through a common language? If it is, how? If not, why? Events in the last few decades have rendered the latter question irrelevant and one is left with the how question component i.e. what is the process or path of development that can be channelled for the West African people.



DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE WEST-AFRICAN SUB-REGION

The hub of the development plan for West Africa is the Economic Community of Western African States ECOWAS. And ‘as in other parts of the developing world, the experience of West Africa with formal regional integration has been largely driven by the desire to overcome the constraint of small economic size’ (Aryeetey 2001). In other words, there was the desire to remove obstacles to human comfort in West Africa such that the outcome will be definable as development as defined earlier in the introductory part of this article. The organised structure of ECOWAS to pursue this lofty idea of transformation of West African states was the Conference of Heads of States, a Council of Ministers, an Executive Secretariat, a Development and Cooperation Fund, and five specialised commissions listed below:

1. Trade, Customs, Immigration, Monetary and Payments;
2. Industry, Agriculture and Natural Resources;
3. Transport, Communications and Energy;
4. Social and Cultural Affairs;
5. Administration and Finance

Going by the reports available, the five specialised commissions have had landmark achievements in the development agenda for the region. For example ECOWAS has completed 83% of the Trans-Coastal high way, 88% of Trans-Sahelian highway, paved 67% of the interconnecting roads and established limited telecommunication links among countries (Aryeetey, 2001). Nevertheless the obstacles to be removed are still daunting.

This article focuses on just two out of the specialised commission’s activities. They are: Transport and Communication; and Social and Cultural Affairs. Transportation, communication, social and cultural affairs especially language are very important development variables that must be handled with all seriousness if any society is to experience development. In his contribution to the issue of integration of West Africa, Michel 2004 citing another writer is of the view that “for the nation to prosper, the individual quality of all citizens has to improve and come into play. Individuals talents have to be treasured and built upon, skills have to match passions and diversity and participation have to be encouraged”. The position of Michel suggests two major weapons to remove obstacles to development in West Africa. They are: Education and communication/transportation. These are the weapons needed to push ahead for a competitive future that will secure West Africa the desired development. These aspects of the development plan have the capacity to accelerate all the past structural and operational efforts of ECOWAS put in place several years ago. While education in all its ramifications i.e. formal, non-formal and informal will free the minds of the West Africans; communication/transportation will lubricate the liberated minds for continuous interactions, integration and ultimately development.

HOW CAN THE WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION BE INTEGRATED?

The contemporary 15 states of West Africa embrace over 200 Million people (Aryeetey, 2001). And if the development agenda of West Africa is people centred/oriented it then means that all categories of West Africa must be enlisted in the agenda for maximum output. Michel observed that ‘in order to not alienate the population it becomes necessary, when

making any major changes, to work at the grassroots level with the people, so they don't see these changes as imposed by a group of elites, but as a mutual agreement between the decision-makers and the persons being directly affected by these changes. The change from poverty to affluence or wealth must be bought into by all and this can best be done through the weapon of language of the people in West Africa. Aside the indigenous languages identified earlier by Falola and Adebayo, through the close to 60 ethnic groups in West Africa, the two official languages in Africa are English and French. In fact, countries in West Africa are divided into the Anglophone and the Francophone countries. The two, over the years, seem to have operated along this divide.

EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE FOR WEST AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

A single word within the African context that links education, knowledge, language and culture for development is proverb. For Isola (2010), proverbs are sources of amazing summaries of time tested empirical observations. Africans generally are very rich in proverbs, which 'are like axioms, widely accepted for their intrinsic value and self-evident truth. A good proverb yet, according to Isola, would send the hearer on a re-evaluation journey to confirm the validity of the statement. For example, when you hear the proverb:

If you lack the properties that identify your age group, you look under-aged.

It sets you thinking. Isn't it?

The thoughts of a people influenced by their culture and environment (physical and social) wrapped in their language lubricates the mind and prepares it for necessary knowledge that could assist in removing barriers to comfort of life. The question to ask is what is the thought pattern in Africa today? Where is the place of value or virtue geared towards real development in an average African today? A majority of Africans are either Anglocentric or Francocentric as a result of colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism and now globalisation.

This article is not about lamentation of the sad state of West African sub-region. It is about its prospects and potentials for development. Consequently, it emphasises the hard facts that the way to go about West African march towards development is a deliberate choice, and use of appropriate language, that can deliver development to her. Still on Isola, he posits that language is a culture's encyclopaedia and culture is a living and dynamic body of knowledge of a people. A sound knowledge of indigenous languages, for Dairo (2015) will afford a second language learner the opportunity of appropriate use of proverbs, idioms and axioms that can be used to embellish and strengthen his/her use of the second or third languages. This is evident in the works of Africans such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Nnamdi Azikiwe and many others.

The point being made here is that a sustainable development for the West African as a region must be anchored and driven by a careful selection of language(s) for development desired.

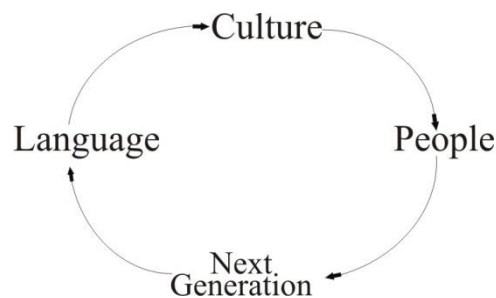
No country has ascended to the level of a first rank economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by scientificating the Japanese language and making it the medium of Japan's industrialisation. (Altbach and Hassan in Isola, 2010).

The developed countries of the world like Japan, America and recently China, and Singapore did not arrive at a ‘state of development’ by mere wishes. They worked out their development. Africans are not lacking in ideas of development needed to transform Africa. What is lacking is the cohesion, integration and strong will to work it out. For Isola, having good ideas is paradise. Working them out is hell! It is only a relentless struggle that can lead Africa to the path of development. Japan, for example, demonstrated that the link with culture is a faster road to development when a Japanese student revealed that:

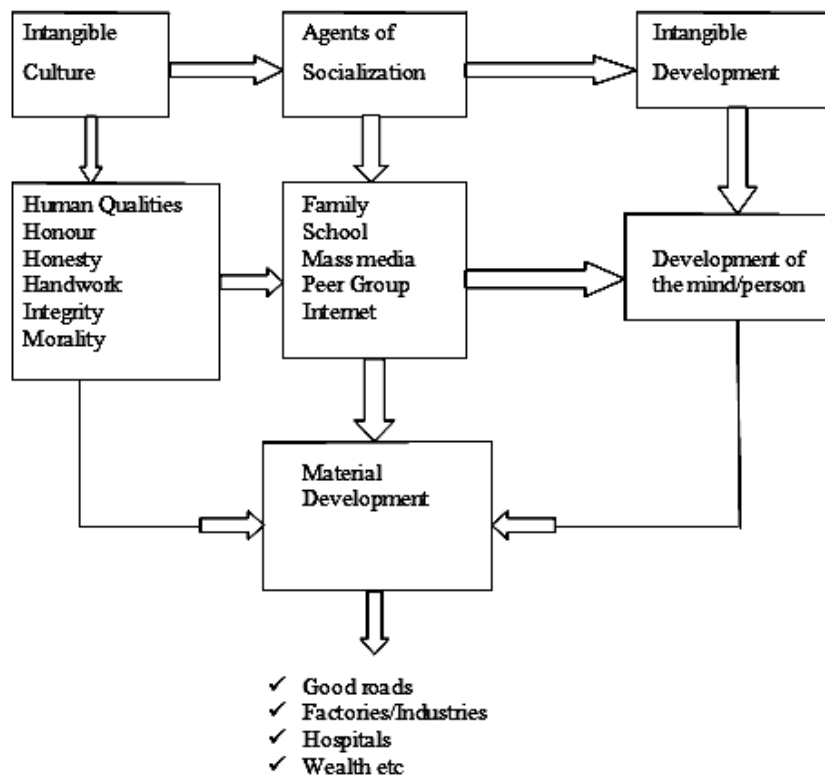
In looking over under-graduate notes taken by his ancestors in Japanese Universities since the 1850s, he noted that his grandfather took all his notes in English, his father half in English, half in Japanese, and his own notes are completely in Japanese. (Nnoli in Ogude 2002:73 cited in Isola 2013).

The citation above is what West Africa needs to work out consciously and develop action plan with its internal resources carefully harnessed towards a single goal – development driven by national leaders, school-educated elites, the politicians, the professionals and traditional rulers of the West African sub-region. Beyond all this however is the need to make the process sustainable in order for the next generation to benefit and continue with the proceeds gained now. This can be achieved by a framework of deliberate link of language, culture, and people with successive generation bond together by a common philosophy of development, which will guide against unfavourable external incursion into the society. It is this philosophy that will shape the peoples’ relation with the rest of the world as people.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT



Below is a graphic presentation of a link between culture, which in this case, is the hub of any real development. For Alliyu 2015, all these socialization variables within a culture combine and interact to produce a specific type of personality required for peace, progress and development of a society.



Source: (Alliyu N 2015:214)

IDEA, COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION

“Every people have shown a capacity for independently increasing their ability to live a more satisfactory life through exploiting the resources of nature (Rodney, 1976). West African people are not devoid of ideas to transform their environment to a more satisfactory level. For Rodney, every continent of the world ‘independently participated in the early epochs of the extension of man’s control over his environment – which means in effect that every continent can point to a period of economic development’. It is no longer news how the economic development attained in West Africa was truncated by the processes of colonisation and imperialism. What is important now is how West Africans can re-initiate a deliberate process by jointly harnessing the capacity of its members to deal with its rich environment all over again to attain a desired contemporary level of development comparable to any other regions of the world.

This feat is attainable by:

- a) Understanding the laws of nature (science)
- b) The practice of that understanding to invent tools (technology) and finally,
- c) The manner of which work is organised towards development deliverables.

The catalysts for the attainment of the process mentioned above are idea generation, communication and transportation. Ideas that are generated and not communicated or transported will become turgid and obsolete. Therefore, the drive towards regional integration can only be enhanced, circulated and sustained through effective communication and transportation. This has however not been possible due to factors identified by Aryeetey as constituting endurances to free movement of persons and development of intra-community trade: The factors include:

1. Cumbersome procedures at border posts, involving considerable delays for travellers;
2. Numerous illegal road blocks along West African highways;

3. Possible extortion, requests to produce unnecessary documents, and demand for illegal levies;
4. National regulations in several members states which run contrary to the provisions of the ECOWAS protocol;
5. Failure of ECOWAS visitors to regularise their stay.

Fundamentally however, is the Anglophone – Francophone divide which has restricted link between the people of West Africa especially in the area of education that is key to the organisation of any development process. The division has not only restricted the English speaking to its areas, it has also caged the French speaking to its territory. Regrettably, either of them maintained a very active line of communication and interaction with their former colonial masters in all ramifications including exchange of ideas. The effect of this is the impossibility to achieve uniformity and comparability of ideas and educational system needed for the development and transformation of West Africa. In terms of communication and transportation, it is obvious that it is more convenient for West African people to communicate with the Europeans and Americans. It is equally easier to transport humans, goods and services to Europe and America from West Africa. The multiplier effects of the easy transportation and convenient communication between West-Africa and Europe are more pronounced in Europe and America that is very far away physically than within the neighbourhood of West African countries. Other effects that naturally follow both communication and transportation is the non-material culture/ideas of Europe and America wrapped in their language to deliver to the West African ‘the superior idea’ about many issues of life.

CONCLUSION AND WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The solution to the disconnect between the countries of the West Africa region can be located in the fundamental bases of the philosophy of the New Africa by Late Dr Nnamdi Azikwe. It is this philosophy of new Africa driven by African language, which has specific meaning for issues of life within specific culture areas of a people that can re integrate and sustain Africa now and for the future. The philosophy includes:

The Cultivation of Spiritual Balance

This means ‘respect for the opinion of others. Conceding to others the right to state their opinion whilst admitting one’s right to state one’s opinion’. This is very vital because according to some scholars, for integration to work “the union must be made up of countries of equal socio-economic importance/status to avoid the fear of possible dominance – in religion, wealth, endowment, size, population etc” (Michel 2004).

Regrettably, there may be little or nothing that can be done about the issue of size, wealth and population of a country as it were. However, for the purpose of genuine integration, countries that have the potentials (in terms of size, endowment, population and so on) to dominate can be put in check by deliberate policies to control the potentials for the benefit of the entire union (Michel 2004). There is therefore the need for all member nations to begin a process of unlearning what had been learned over the years in their respective isolatory conditions that may impede the integration and at the same time begin to learn new attitudes and acquire new attributes that would foster the union. Interestingly, these attitudes and attributes are richly endowed in African culture of being ‘our brother’s keeper’.

The Experience of Social Regeneration

This experience will include the jettisoning of all forms of prejudices, be they racial, national, tribal, societal, religious, political, economic, or ethical; the breaking down of all barriers which so far, have postponed social unity of West African people. This can be driven by *justice, equity* and *fairness* in the dealings among member nations. For example, while in Ghana, as a practicing journalist of international repute and Editor of The African Morning Post, the former president of Nigeria Dr Nnamdi Azikwe argued:

It is too evident that in the metropolis of Accra there are many persons with diverse tribal affiliation. Accra is, therefore, a laboratory of inter-tribal and intra-tribal relationship. When now a candidate for re-election to the Legislative Council presented himself to the Accra public on a platform which looked upon certain tribes as inferior to the others, and branded certain denizens with uncomplimentary epithets and sobriquets, I opposed his candidature successfully because I felt that such a person lacked social vision, and was therefore a misleader

The major political challenge therefore about the cherished integration is how a new social vision can be re-enacted again among member nations as it used to be in the uncontaminated typical African setting of old.

The Realisation of Economic Determinism

Realisation that economic self-sufficiency, on a sane basis, is the ultimate means to survival of any society, it is the only way to arrive at a stable society (Alliyu 2010). There is no doubt that West Africa is blessed with lots of educated people, however such education must now become a tool for adaptation to West-African environment such that people's lives can be meaningful. Formal education, non-formal education and informal education must be guided by a common agenda for development across member nations. The language of choice for this process must deliberately infuse into the people new concepts of confidence, self worth, appreciation, determination, brotherliness and so on. All these had been in the personality make up of African people and it can certainly be regained if so desired.

The Creation of Mental Emancipation

According to Nnamdi Azikwe, there is no scientific proof to sustain the idea of superiority or inferiority of any race, physically or mentally. To accept the opposite of this statement is to sign one's death warrant. Integration, cooperation and development are not achievable where the attitude of superiority and/or inferiority prevails. This must be totally removed in both the old and new generation of Africans. It must be erased in her relationship among member states and between West African and other peoples of the World particularly Europe and America. The arrow-head of the West African state and many other stakeholders across all walks of life must continue to put in place activities to liberate the minds of African and create a new mentality of 'can do' in the next generations of Africans.

The Expectation of Political Resurgence

The expectation of political risorgimento is a function of the other four conditions highlighted above. Politics is a means to an end, which is more glorious than the means through which the end must be attained. African politics must move

beyond the old order. It must move beyond the stage where the old order stupefies new order. The reality is here. The age of ICT is here and it is dominated by the youth. ICT is the driving force behind viral spread of ideas and information now. The inclusion of the youth therefore in the political resurgence of Africa now is not negotiable but it must be guided by the right language, culture and focus towards the desired development agenda for West Africa. The right language in this context is the language of Africans for Africa for integration and development. In essence, African children from age 0-20 must be taught in their mother tongue all subjects of life so as to gain depth and knowledge about their environment and the world. African children must also be exposed to other languages of the world at the universal level to enable them express their acquired knowledge in world languages at world level.

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