

African languages for understanding and progress

Neville Alexander

University of Cape Town – South Africa

This keynote address considers the dynamics of the language question in Africa especially after the attainment of political independence. Its point of departure is the fact that without the development and use of African languages in high status functions, especially in the domain of the so-called formal economy, Africa's development will continue to be lopsided, elitist and externally orientated. The responsibility of language scholars, specifically of theoretical and applied linguists, for ensuring that this trajectory is realised in the course of the next two generations, more or less, is analysed and against this background, the tasks and challenges that face the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) as the official continental language planning agency of the AU are discussed. An appeal is made to linguists to pay more attention to applied linguistics and to establish an appropriate, mutually reinforcing, balance between the different academic and professional practices.