**PROJECT BRIEF**

**Mainstreaming Kiswahili in Uganda’s National Agenda for Regional Integration and Sustainable Development**

As a factor of development, language has received considerable attention worldwide. Development and language are believed to be irrevocably connected with the latter interwoven in almost all aspects of the former. Language is beginning to occupy a more central position in national development planning, with language problems becoming increasingly urgent (Ndukwe, 2015; Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998; Fishman, 1973). Hence, mainstreaming language in national agenda has been quickly adopted as a strategy to realize development (Fasold, 2012; Kayambazinthu-Lora, 2003; Laitin, 1992). The Language Question in Africa since colonial times has raised controversial debates on language choice, development and use.

Language is one cultural tool that should be embraced to tap into development opportunities. Language is part of culture with values which are embedded in our societies as powerful resources with large human and social costs when lost. Language is the key element of communication and since there is no development without communication, we can state that language has a particularly important function in the achievement of sustainable development. Language links planners, implementers and policy makers; it is that link that makes people understand what development is all about.

According to KAKAMA (2019), Kiswahili is quickly evolving and undergoing rapid change in response to emerging needs across the EAC, Africa and beyond. The changes taking place are concerned with usage issues and socio-political roles in individual Partner States and the Community at large. Despite the fact that the EAC Partner States share a lot of historical, social, cultural and linguistic background, these aspects have not been given the attention they deserve. The emphasis being put on the four integration pillars; Monetary Union, Common Market, Customs Union and Political Federation needs to be enforced with promotion of the cultural values. Through traditionally integration has been based on economic and political aspects, there is need to integrate the cultural issues. Language is part of culture and it enhances communication. Strategic communication through a language of wider communication enables citizens to participate in national development and the integration process.

Article 137(2) of the Treaty for the establishment of the East African Community (EAC) states that Kiswahili shall be developed as lingua franca of the community. Uganda has an obligation and commitment to develop and institutionalize the language since it is a signatory to the Protocol. Uganda is a signatory to the protocol that established the East African Kiswahili Commission (EAC, 2008) that requires each Partner State to commit to institutionalize and promote Kiswahili. Furthermore, Article 6 (2) of the Constitution of Uganda provides that “Kiswahili shall be the second official language in Uganda to be used in such circumstances as Parliament may by law prescribe”. And in 2019, the Cabinet of Uganda approved the principles for the establishment of the National Kiswahili Council to fulfill the government obligation as an EAC Partner State and also to operationalize article 6(2) of the Constitution.

Nationally, Uganda’s Vision 2040 and the National Development Plan III, indicate the fact that Uganda lacks a shared culture and national value system. This affects the citizenry in the way they perceive different development ideas, their attitude and mindset which in the end affect the social development of the country. There is need to promote Kiswahili language as a cultural tool that that will be shared among the citizens as an aspect of shared culture and hence shared values.

The study on ‘Mainstreaming Kiswahili in Uganda’s National Agenda for Regional Integration and Sustainable Development’ was carried out in response torealities of modern life in the country, in the region and across the globe. While Kiswahili is the lingua franca of the EAC, and whereas efforts are being made to institutionalize it as the official language of the Community and the country, Uganda faces a dilemma on the language, lacks a coherent policy and the position of the language is largely ambiguous. Despite the government efforts to promote Kiswahili and its popularity elsewhere, its status in Uganda’s national agenda still remains both emotive and sensitive. Only 35% usage has been recorded compared to the more than 90% in Kenya and Tanzania (African post News, 2015). Until 2019, the language was taught by selected schools at Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels despite its existence on the curriculum menu. This calls for a new approach to the development and promotion of the language to integrate it in all domains in a planned and coordinated manner.

Kiswahili is now an integral part of East African cultural identity. Despite the existing linguistic situation at local, national and regional levels, and in spite of constitutional provisions that accord Kiswahili an official status, the reality has not been translated into realities, policy and practice. The existing situation in Uganda calls for deliberate government efforts and conscious official interventions that will guide the development and use of Kiswahili to serve the needs of her citizens at the national, regional and global levels. Hence, integrating Kiswahili in Uganda’s national agenda heralds a new approach to integration and development more consistent with current global trends where language is considered an important institution that deserves serious consideration. The future of the country calls for new approaches to the development of the language for strategic communication and citizenry participation in national and regional development agenda. Within this context, the study was carried out to critically discuss mainstreaming Kiswahili in Uganda’s national agenda as a strategy for promoting the development and use of the language with a view to strategically position the country for active participation in regional integration and sustainable development.