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THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE

By the Administrative Director

A French version of this paper will be published in the January 1975 number of *Africa*.

AIMS OF THE INSTITUTE

THE first number of *Africa*, published two years after the founding of the Institute in 1926, opened with the following statement on the Institute's objectives:

There are at the present time so many societies and institutes—national and international—that there would be no justification for the inauguration of yet another unless it had an object in view, different from, or at least not effectively met by, any existing organisation. There are two directions in which the organisations at present in existence need to be supplemented, and the Institute has been founded in the hope of meeting these two requirements.

In the first place the Institute will be a co-ordinating agency, a central bureau and a clearing-house for information. It will make the experience and knowledge of the most distinguished workers in African subjects in different parts of Africa and in Europe and America available in increasing measure for all workers in this field. It will also make it possible for those who are working at a problem in isolation to learn more quickly and clearly the kind of help and suggestion that they may obtain from those who are dealing with analogous problems in other parts of the continent. The Institute will thus be neither the counterpart nor the rival of any existing society, but on the contrary will offer its assistance—in so far as it may be able to assist—to each of these.

Secondly, the distinctive characteristic of the Institute is that its aims will not be restricted exclusively to the field of scientific study, but will be directed also towards bringing about a closer association of scientific knowledge and research with practical affairs in Africa. All the work of the Institute will be based on strictly scientific principles and carried out by scientific methods. But it will at the same time attempt to relate the results of research to the actual life of African peoples, and to discover how the investigations undertaken by scientific workers may be made available for the solution of pressing questions that are the concern of all those who are working for the good of Africa.

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Despite the enormous changes which have taken place in Africa and in the field of African studies during the last half-century, the above words remain as relevant today to the general planning of the Institute's activities as when they were first written. Specific needs and circumstances have of course changed, and the means for achieving the established aims of the Institute in the future need to be reviewed against the background of its activities in the past and the opportunities now presented for expanding or redirecting these. It is hoped that these opportunities will engage the active interest and support of its members in all countries.

PROGRAMME OF THE INSTITUTE 1926-74

The Institute has to date undertaken or sponsored the publication of over 300 original volumes in the field of African studies, including sixty volumes in the continuing *Ethnographic Survey of Africa (Monographies Ethnologiques Africaines)* and forty-four annual volumes of the journal *Africa*. Information services provided by the Institute have included the quarterly publication of the *International African Bibliography* (now prepared at the School of Oriental and African Studies), the regional and subject volumes of the *Africa Bibliography Series*, *African Abstracts* (from 1950 to 1972), and the five volume *Cumulative Bibliography of African Studies*, published in 1973. The Institute's Research Information Liaison Unit has compiled and published the *International Register of Organisations undertaking Africanist Research* (1971), three volumes of *Current Africanist Research*, listing over 5,000 projects under way in the period 1971-3, and the newly prepared *International Guide to African Studies Research* (1975). Over the years since its foundation the Institute also built up a valuable library in London, the staff of which provided an information service for members of the Institute. Unfortunately, owing to financial and accommodation problems beyond its control, the Institute was forced to close down the library side of its activities in 1973, although the Institute's original library collection may still be consulted at the University of Manchester.

In the field of actual research the Institute has sponsored research fellows in a variety of disciplines who have worked, either individually or in teams, in Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaïre, and Zambia. In linking linguistic research with the practical language problems of Africa, the Institute was responsible for pioneering the International African Alphabet, adopted for over sixty languages, and for awarding prizes for many original works of literature in African languages. The Institute also sponsored the Linguistic Survey of the Northern Bantu Borderland, from Cameroon to Kenya.

Since 1959 a total of fifteen seminars and conferences have been held in Africa under the joint auspices of the Institute and local universities or research institutes, covering topics in the fields of sociology, economics, law, religion, language, history, and bibliography.¹ This programme, resulting in a series of edited volumes,

¹ These have included the Tropical African Studies Conference (Ibadan, 1964), the International Conference on African Bibliography (Nairobi, 1967), and International Seminars on Social Change in

Modern Africa (Makerere, 1959), Land Rights and Land Use in Tropical Africa (Lovanium, 1960), African Systems of Thought, Religious Belief and Ritual, Traditional and Modern (Salisbury, 1960),

was organized by the late Administrative Director, Professor Daryll Forde, and was funded by the Ford Foundation.

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF THE INSTITUTE

In the years ahead it is important that the Institute should build on the foundations which have already been laid. The continuation and expansion of its range of publications will be a major priority, and the Institute will also continue its efforts to support direct research through the provision of fellowships and scholarships. Special attention will be given to the improvement of contacts and communications among countries where French, English, Arabic, and Portuguese are used.

The continuation of the Institute's informational and co-ordinating role will be reflected in the establishment of two new sections of the Institute, discussed in greater detail below: an Environmental Review Unit, concerned with the current state of the environment and environmental research, and a Language and Education Unit, concerned with the written and educational use of African languages. Since both these units will relate to Africa (or to sub-Saharan Africa) as a whole, there will be advantages in their location in an international centre of communications, facilitating the rapid collection and distribution of data from and to all countries involved. It is desirable, however, that there should be increasing participation from African countries in the Institute's activities in London, including involvement of research fellows from African universities in the operation of the two new units. The Institute needs also to strengthen its links with comparable organizations and institutions based in Africa, especially where joint projects are feasible, or where the liaison facilities of the Institute in London can be placed at their service. Throughout its programme, the Institute will seek to support, not duplicate, the work of other institutions.

Environmental Review Unit

The recent drought, affecting many African states, has focused attention on the need for increased co-ordination of knowledge on all aspects of the rural environment in Africa, involving disciplines as far apart as sociology and climatology, and countries as far apart as Senegal and Ethiopia. The acquisition and application of specialized knowledge, relating to the natural and human environments in Africa, are of concern to a wide range of national and international organizations and institutions, both inside and outside Africa. The very diversity of the countries, institutions, disciplines, and languages involved, however, poses grave problems impeding inter-communication and the synthesis of data from varied sources. It is in contributing to the solution of these problems that the International African Institute has a duty to perform, given its established international, and independent, role in the fields of research, information, and publication.

African Ethno-History (Dakar, 1962), The Influence of Islam in Tropical Africa (Zaria, 1964), The Emergence of New Social Classes and the Roles of Elites in Contemporary Africa (Ibadan, 1964), The Influence of Christianity in Tropical Africa (Legon, 1965), Concepts and Procedures in African Law (Addis Ababa, 1966), Language Use

and Social Change (Dar es Salaam, 1968), African Trade and Markets in West Africa (Fourah Bay, 1969), Modern Migrations in Western Africa (Dakar, 1972), Town and Country in Central and Eastern Africa (Lusaka, 1972), Pastoralism in Tropical Africa (Niamey, 1972).

As a direct result of the needs discussed and recognized at the 1973 Symposium on Drought in Africa,² the Institute has established an Environmental Review Unit in London with the following objectives:

1. To maintain close contact with institutions and individuals concerned with the monitoring, study or modification of the environment in Africa.
2. To gather documentation on current environmental issues in Africa, on African environmental research, and on relevant developmental programmes in Africa.
3. To maintain a continuous, comparative review of this material.
4. To produce a quarterly bulletin, in English and French, concerned with the rapid publication and wide distribution of current data and assessments on the state of the environment in Africa, of information on current research and development, and of scientific articles or informed debate relating to the current situation or to future planning.
5. To draw attention to areas where further field research, experimentation and/or documentation are required, and, if requested, to assist African institutions in seeking funds for such purposes.
6. To concentrate, throughout, on the improvement of communications and co-ordination of data between the social and natural sciences.

The personnel of the Unit will consist of several full-time doctoral or post-doctoral research officers and a research secretary, and its work will be guided and supported by a panel of professional advisers on an honorary basis, including representatives of interested disciplines and of relevant institutions throughout Africa and elsewhere. The Unit, in pursuing its aims, will be guided in particular by advice from the African countries it is intended to serve.

The dimensions of the task facing the new Unit cannot be under-estimated, and priority in its initial work will therefore be given to the state of agricultural and pastoral economies in semi-arid areas south of the Sahara. If it is successful in its early stages, the scope of the Unit will be progressively widened, as increased finance and personnel become available. The Unit will endeavour to collect data on the current ecological and agricultural situation in each region of sub-Saharan Africa, including actual or threatened drought-situations or other sources of agricultural disaster, together with information on current research, pilot projects, and developmental schemes.

Information will need to be gathered from universities and research institutes, from governmental, international, and private agencies, from local press and radio, and from individual correspondents. The disciplines involved include, in the social sciences, human geography and demography, sociology and social anthropology, economics and development studies, law, administrative studies, history, international relations and language study; and in the natural and physical sciences, climatology and meteorology, geomorphology, hydrology, and geology, soil science

² See D. Dalby and R. J. Harrison Church (eds.), *Drought in Africa* (Report of the 1973 Symposium), School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1973. Further materials from the 1973 Symposium have been published in *Savanna* (Zaria), December 1973 and in *African Affairs* (London), April 1974.

For related topics discussed at the International African Institute Seminar on Pastoralism in Tropical Africa (held at Niamey in 1972), see Th. Monod (ed.), *Pastoralism in Tropical Africa*, O.U.P. for the I.A.I. (in press).

and agriculture (including pastoralism), ecology, botany, zoology, medicine, nutrition, veterinary science and technology. In view of the Institute's traditional concern with the social sciences and the humanities, the inclusion of the natural sciences within the work of the Unit will require particularly close collaboration and regular consultation with professional advisers from the relevant disciplines. The implications of environmental studies for the peoples of Africa will remain the focus of the Unit's work, especially in the search for more effective inter-disciplinary approaches of direct relevance and practical benefit to the peoples of each area.

A digest and review of the assembled data will be included in the quarterly bulletin to be produced by the Unit, particular emphasis being given to information requiring rapid circulation. Included in the latter category will be scientific articles, or summaries of articles, the results of which need to be made available more quickly and widely than publication in specialist journals would allow. The Institute is seeking funds to subsidize the bulletin in order that it may be distributed as widely as possible throughout Africa.

The building up of the Unit will take place progressively over a two-year period, allowing time for experimentation in its working methods. An important part of the initial costs of the Unit has been covered by a grant from the Leverhulme Trust Fund, and additional funds are currently being sought from other public and private sources. A full statement on the programme of the Unit is available from the Institute.

Language and Education Unit

The written and educational use of African languages was among the first and most important concerns of the Institute, originally founded under the title of 'International Institute for African Languages and Cultures'. The Institute gave support to the written development of many African languages, not only through the introduction of the International African Alphabet from the 1920s onwards, but also through the promotion of linguistic analyses and surveys and through the encouragement of original writing in African languages.³

A new Language and Education Unit is currently being established by the Institute as a continuation of its work in this field. The primary objective of the Unit will be to review the practical application and results, throughout the continent, of linguistic research, development, and experimentation over the last half century, concentrating on the following aspects:

1. Past and current policies and practices relating to the use of African languages within the primary, secondary, and higher educational systems and in the literacy and mass education programmes of each country.
2. The present and possible future roles of African languages *vis-à-vis* European languages at national and international levels.

³ For previous research work and publications sponsored by the I.A.I. in the field of African languages, see *A Practical Orthography of African Languages* (1st edn., 1927, revised 1930); D. Westermann and I. C. Ward, *Practical Phonetics for Students of African Languages* (1st edn., 1933); *Handbook of*

African Languages, 8 volumes (1945-66); *Linguistic Survey of the Northern Bantu Borderlands*, 3 volumes (1956-7); W. H. Whiteley, *Language Use and Social Change: Problems of Multilingualism with Special Reference to Eastern Africa*, O.U.P. for I.A.I., 1971; etc.

3. The contribution of African languages, in their written form, to the extension and appreciation of traditional cultures and literatures.

By making available the results of this ongoing review the Unit will endeavour to meet the need for more detailed comparative information on past and current research, experimentation, and practical experience in the written and educational use of African languages.⁴ The large number of countries, institutions, and language areas involved has often hindered the exchange and general availability of data in this field, and there has frequently been a lack of co-ordination between the academic and practical study of African languages. An improvement in this respect will enable experience gained in a particular country to be more readily of benefit to linguistic planning elsewhere in the continent.

At the educational level, the Unit will be concerned to gather relevant data, from all countries, on the use of specific African languages in schools, training colleges, and universities as media or subjects of instruction, the development and use of African language materials for purposes of literacy and mass education, and the involvement of African universities and research institutes in programmes of linguistic research and development. The Unit will at the same time survey policies towards 'official' and 'national' languages, and the use of African languages in government, administration and law, broadcasting and publishing, commerce and religion. A comparative review will be maintained of initiatives taken in the African language field by governments, national institutions, international organizations, and private agencies.

The personnel of the Unit will include two or more research officers, together with the editor of a periodical review covering current work in the field of African language study and education. Its work will be guided by a panel of professional advisers on an honorary basis, including representatives of relevant institutions throughout Africa.

It is envisaged that the work of the Language and Education Unit should include the preparation of a conference on the written and educational use of African languages, to be held in 1976 (the Institute's 50th anniversary) in conjunction with appropriate African institutions. A full statement on the programme of the Unit is available from the Institute.

Research Information Liaison Unit

The work of this Unit, established with a Ford Foundation grant in 1970, has been brought up to date with the forthcoming publication of the *International Guide to African Studies Research*, comprising an updated register of institutions, in all countries, undertaking African studies research in the humanities and social sciences, and including also the fourth bulletin of the Unit's cumulative listing of current Africanist research projects. The publication date of the *Guide* is January 1975.

Although current funding for the Unit is now at an end, efforts will be made to maintain the Unit's register of African studies research undertaken at African

⁴ For a presentation of this need, see A. Bambose, 'Linguistics and Language Education: Problems and Policy', in *Educational Studies and Documents*, 11, UNESCO, 1973.

institutions, pending arrangements for the transfer of this work to an appropriate base in Africa.

Publications Programme

The production or sponsoring of original publications will remain central to the activities of the Institute. As far as *Africa* is concerned, it is hoped to undertake a gradual increase in the size and scope of the journal, including expansion of its role in conveying current news and information and a restoration of its bibliographical services. The Institute is interested in opportunities for continued collaboration with other institutions concerned with the preparation of African bibliographies, in order that duplication of effort should be minimized.

The publications programme will be expanded to take account of the materials produced or edited by the Environmental Review Unit and the Language and Education Unit. In the field of African literature, the Institute is anxious to examine ways in which it may support the publication of original and translated texts, especially in collaboration with African institutions, and also encourage an interest in African literature outside Africa. There is at the same time an urgent need for brief, well-written guides to assist the growing number of people in Africa who wish to write and record texts in their own language (especially in areas where no African language instruction is yet available).

The Institute has always been concerned to help bridge the gap between Franco-phone and Anglophone countries and numerous volumes, and articles in *Africa*, have been published by the Institute in French. These have always been in a relatively small minority, however, and the Institute is examining ways in which the balance between the two languages may be improved.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE INSTITUTE

Since its establishment as an independent organization in 1926, membership of the Institute has been open to all persons and organizations interested in Africa, regardless of nationality, and the total number of individual and institutional members is currently around 2,500. It is hoped to increase this number in the future, as the activities of the Institute expand, although it will be necessary from 1976 to increase the present uneconomic membership fees. The Executive Council has agreed, however, that a new reduced rate for students registered at African institutions should be introduced at the same time that general membership rates are raised.

The Governing Body of the Institute is composed of representatives of universities and scientific associations in Africa, Europe, and elsewhere, and the current Executive Council includes scholars from twelve countries. An important need for the future is to review the role which members of the Governing Body can play in the active running of the Institute's programme, and also to review the composition of the Executive Council in terms of the nationalities and academic disciplines represented by individual members.

FINANCING OF THE INSTITUTE

Apart from publication sales and membership fees, the finances of the Institute have been supported by governments in Europe and Africa (especially the United

Kingdom, Nigeria, and France), by several major foundations (including Rockefeller, Ford, and Leverhulme), and by business companies in several countries. The success of the Institute in carrying out its future programme will be dependent on the continuation of governmental and non-governmental support of this kind, ideally from as wide a range of countries as possible.

Outside support is required particularly in respect of accommodation for the Institute's headquarters. The present location is justified by close proximity to the considerable bibliographical and documentary resources of central London, and by the fact that representatives of African studies programmes in all parts of the world so frequently pass through that city. Rentals are, however, extremely high, and one of the greatest contributions that could be made to the activities of the Institute would be the provision of free or subsidized accommodation in London. This would enable the Institute's activities to be housed more permanently and adequately, and would also free part of the Institute's income for more productive purposes.