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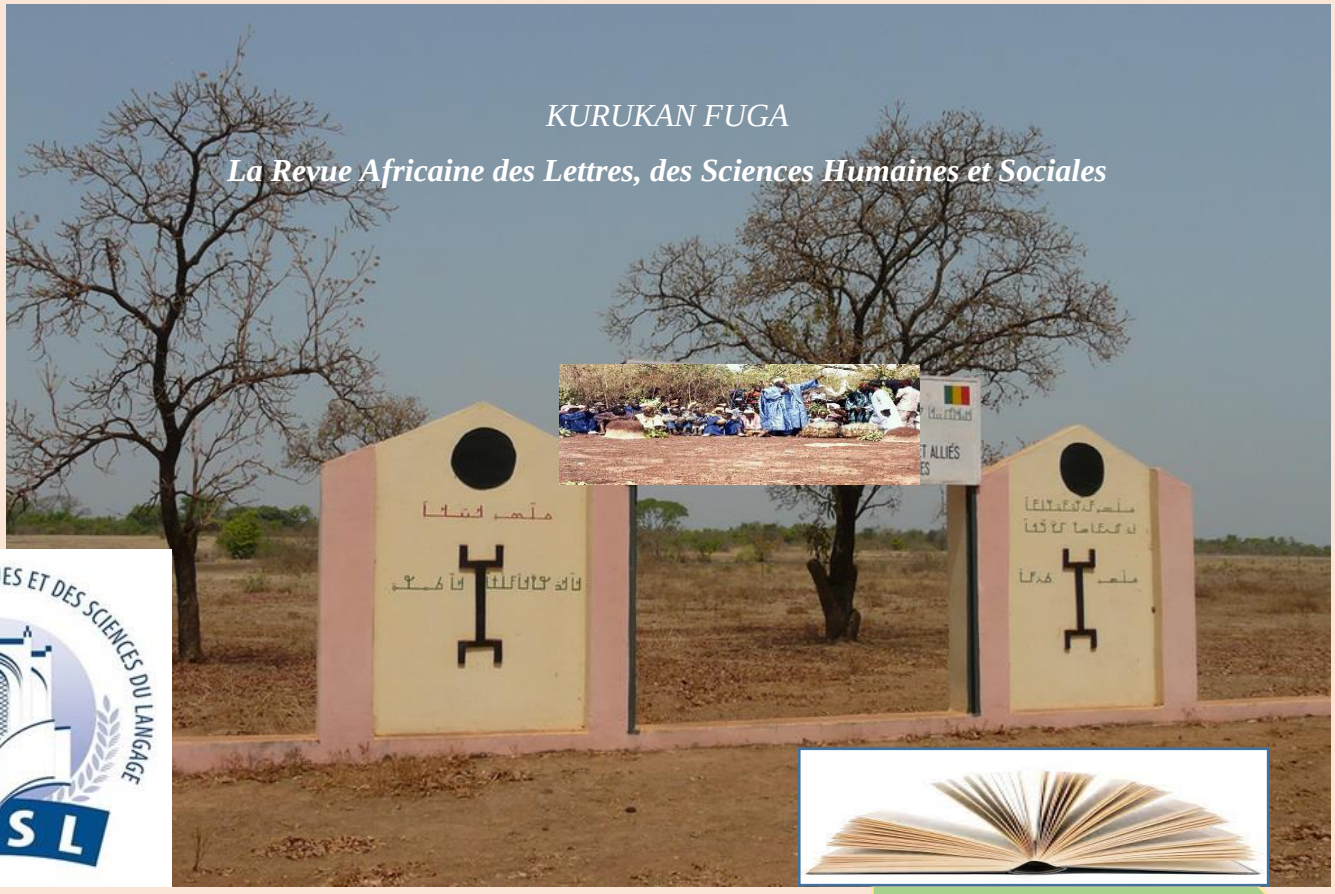

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La Revue Africaine des Lettres, des Sciences Humaines et Sociales ***KURUKAN FUGA***

LITERARY PRODUCTIONS IN MOTHER TONGUES IN MALI: WHICH READERSHIP?

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Résumé
La promotion des langues maternelles est l'une des priorités des autorités maliennes. Aujourd'hui, cette question est plus d'actualité que jamais avec la nouvelle loi constitutionnelle. Cet article a enquêté sur les productions littéraires écrites dans les langues maternelles et dans quelle mesure elles sont lues. En d'autres termes, qui sont les lecteurs des langues maternelles maliennes ? Une recherche bibliographique a été utilisée comme instrument de collecte de données. Elle comprenait un inventaire des livres écrits dans les langues maternelles de huit maisons d'édition de Bamako et dans les institutions nationales comme l'Académie Malienne des Langues (AMALAN). Après avoir recensé les titres des œuvres existantes dans les langues maliennes, un questionnaire a été soumis aux lecteurs potentiels dans ces langues maternelles afin d'évaluer le nombre de lecteurs. Les résultats ont démontré qu'il existe peu d'œuvres dans presque toutes les 13 langues officielles mais que le nombre de lecteurs est relativement faible. Alors que certains ignorent l'existence de ces œuvres, d'autres savent qu'elles existent mais ne savent pas les lire.
Mots clés : : lecteur, lectorat, langue maternelle, malien, Bamako.

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Abstract:
The promotion of mother tongues is one of the priorities of the Malian authorities. Today, the issue is more topical than ever with the new constitutional law. This article investigated literary productions written in mother tongues and the extent to which they are read. In other words, who are the readers of Malian mother tongues? A literature search was used as a data-gathering instrument. It included an inventory of books written in Mother tongues at eight publishing houses in Bamako and the national languages institution that is Academie Malienne Des Langues (AMALAN)[1]. After having the titles of most existing works in Malian languages, a questionnaire was submitted to potential readers in these mother tongues to assess the number of readers. The findings demonstrated that there are few works in almost all the 13 official languages but the number of readers is relatively very low. While some do not know the existence of these works, others know they exist but cannot read them.
Keywords: reader, readership, mother tongue, Malian, Bamako

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[1] Malian Academy of Languages

Introduction

The topic of this paper is entitled: Literary productions in mother tongues in Mali: which readership? It is a topic of prime importance in a country where it is generally observed that the written books, especially scholarly ones and those written in mothers tongues, are no more given due attention by the readers. This is all the more worrying as Mali is a multilingual country in which about twenty mother tongues are spoken (Calvet, 1992: 215; Canut and Dumestre, 1993: 220). Of these 13 languages have the status of national language. Except for one language (Hassanya), the other 12 languages were experimented in teaching. The promotion of these languages dates back to 1966 at the UNESCO conference in Bamako. After numerous linguistic works, Decree No. 85/PGRM of 26 May 1966 adopted the Latin alphabet to transcribe our languages. In 1996, Law No. 96-049 promulgated by the President of the Republic of Mali on the promotion of national languages states: "The State recognizes the right of local authorities and citizens to initiate or participate in the actions promoting the following languages national: Bamanankan (Bambara), Bomu (bobo), Bozo (bozo), Dɔgɔsɔ (dogon), Fulfulde (Fulani),NHassanya (Moorish), Mamara (miniyanka), Maninkakan (Malinké), Soninké (Sarakolé), Soŋoy (Songhoy), Syenara (sénoufo), Tamãsãyt (Tamasheq), Xaasongaxango (Khassonké)."

Therefore, the country has implemented policies for the popularization of productions in our languages; hence the creation of certain structures, including DNAFLA, and AMALAN which work mainly for the promotion of languages elevated to the rank of national languages. At the same time, they work on others to reach the same level as the 13 languages. Moreover, many NGOs have set as a goal the promotion of our languages in terms of production and training. This is how the first private national publishing house, Edition Jamana[2], was created in 1986. Its main purpose was to publish in national languages. Other publishing houses like La Sahélienne in 1992, Donniya in 1996 and many others were born after.

During the National Assembly for the Re-foundation of Mali[3], the need "to formalize the national languages in official forums" was raised. Finally, these requests were taken into account and Article 31 of the new Constitution, promulgated on July 22, 2023, states: "The national languages are the official languages of Mali … French is the language of work".

[2] Publishing House Jamana

[3] Important decisions about the future of Mali were proposed by Malian citizens from various social strata.

Thus, this study aims to make an inventory of the production of literary works written in the mother tongues of Mali, which I will interchangeably refer to as national languages in this paper. The paper also sets to take stock of the proportion of the investigated people who engage in reading in their mother tongue. The Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, aptly pointed out, during an interview at BBC African service:

> "Literature, as a process of linking images, utilizes language and grows upon the collective experience, that is history, embodied in that language. In writing one should hear all the whispering, all the shouting, all the crying, all the loving and all the hating of the many voices in the past, and those voices will never speak to a writer in a foreign language." (ZELL, 1984: 19)

We investigated literary productions in our languages in Bamako by trying to answer the following questions: What are the literary productions written and published in Mother Languages in Mali? Who are the readers?

Like many other countries across the world, Mali has undergone colonization. As a result, the issue of which language to use (mother tongue or official language versus working language) by the Malian populations in particular contexts remains a critical one. BAMGBOSE (2004) reflected on the *Language of Instruction Policies in Africa*. FAFUNWA, MACAULEY & SOKOYA (1989) questioned the use of mother tongue in school education. As for TEMBE & NORTON (2008), they underscored the necessity of introducing and promoting local languages in Ugandan primary schools. Lastly, TRUDELL (2009) established a link between local-language literacy and sustainable development.

One cannot question Malian literature or the language in which it is written without thinking about political issues. The colonial language is one of the most visible traces of the legacy that the former settlers bequeathed us. That is what Kane (1971) demonstrated in his book *Ambiguous Adventure*. He talked about the legacy of the French language to Africans after colonization. In fact, due to multilingualism and lack of linguistic resources, the former colonies were obliged to learn the colonizers' language. "The French language has been adopted and officialized as the language of instruction, and administration" (COULIBALY, 2022: 52). As a result, many educated Africans cannot read in their mother tongues. Kane added that the European school, where their languages are the means of instruction, will cause Africans to lose important things including their languages. To him, this school that he describes as a new canon is more dangerous than the canon itself (colonization). While the first one constrains the body, the latter colonizes the mind (Kane, 1971, p. 36).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o also denounced linguistic colonization. He recognizes that African literature should only be written in our own languages (at least, as far as the source language is concerned: the originality of the works). That is why he asks "What is African Literature? Was it literature about Africa or about the African experience? Was it literature written by Africans? Or were African languages the criteria?" (NGUGI, 1981: 6). It was in this dynamic that he renounced any publication in English. From then on, all his works were first written in Kikuyu, his mother tongue. In his writings, *Homecoming* (1972) and *Decolonising the Mind*: *The Politics of Language in African Literature*, the defender of African literature stressed that the use of foreign languages is the vehicle for the continuity of subjugation. Independence is also about valuing our languages: writing and reading.

This historical and political background of Malian languages is important to our topic of investigation. It permits to understand the causes of the limitlessness of the literary works and the leadership in Malian mother tongues in general. Years later, some political moves were made regionally and nationally toward the rectification of the linguistic gaps observed. At the regional level, with the creation of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), the decision of the Language Action Plan for Africa was acted. The Language Action Plan states that "ACALAN recognizes that the promotion of African languages … is a vital factor in accelerating African integration." At the national level, with the creation of DNAFLA (National Directorate of Functional Literacy and Applied Linguistics) by the ordonnance N° 60 CMLN of October 21st, 1975, and later AMALAN (the national branch of ACALAN), Mali started to initiate adult literacy in Malian languages and to implement them in school, progressively. In 1979, Bamanankan was firstly experienced. In 1982, Fulfulde, Songhay, and Tamasheq were also taught. The official implementation of national languages in formal education followed this progress: 1994: Bamanankan, Fulfulde, and Sɔngoy, 1995: Tamasheq, Dɔgɔsɔ, and Soninke, 1998: Bomu and Syenara, 2000: Bozo and Mamara, 2001: Xaasongaxango.

In this study, I first present the methodology that governed the collection and analysis of data. Then, I determine the research participants, and present the key findings. Some recommendations are also proposed that aim to foster publishing and reading in mothers' tongues in Mali.

1. Methodology

The present paper uses a descriptive method in an attempt to determine the extent of reading in mother tongues in Mali. According to Good and Scates (2004), the descriptive method of

research is a method of gathering evidence relating to the currently or recent conditions concerning the nature of a group of persons, a number of objects or a class of events and may involve the procedure of introduction, analysis, clarification, enumeration of measurement. As part of this investigation, publishing houses were surveyed and a questionnaire was designed as a key instrument to collect data from the participants.

1.1. Research Participants

This study aims to identify literary productions in mother tongues in Mali, to list the publishing houses that publish in our languages, and also to make an evaluation of the number of readers in our Malian languages. Moreover, the research endeavors to gauge the extent of readership within Mali's linguistic framework. To fulfill these objectives, we embarked on fieldwork to engage with key actors in book production, specifically targeting publishing houses known for their focus on mother tongues. Within these publishing houses, particular attention was directed towards cataloging the titles of literary works authored in the national languages. Although attempts were made to access sales data for a comprehensive assessment. Unfortunately, this data remained inaccessible. Through exhaustive examination, a total of 74 literary productions were identified across eight publishing houses: La Sahélienne, EDIS, Harmattan, Toguna, Donniya, Jamana, Prostyle, and SIL-Mali. Furthermore, we interviewed some key stakeholders in the book distribution network, notably authors, researchers, and publishers, who write and disseminate literary works encompassing poetry, novels, and plays. Lastly, we distributed a questionnaire to a randomly selected group of 60 students enrolled in FLSL (Faculté des Lettres, des Langues et des Sciences du Langage). Notably, within the FLSL curriculum, the national language is a minor subject for all L1 students.

3.2 Data Collection and Presentation

Malian literature written in the national language is of two categories: on the one hand, the rewritings of works from the oral tradition. This is not the transcription of oral works from a recording but the very free adaptation of these works, often for didactic purposes, to comply with the requirements of written literary works. It consists of adaptations of tales or epics, and historical legends, sometimes for a young audience, sometimes for adults. On the other hand, these are works composed of written literature, such as novels, plays, short stories, essays, biographies, autobiographies, epics and comic book stories. The focus of our investigation was primarily on the latter. The tables below represent data from the eight publishing houses:

Table1: Literary works in the visited published houses

N°	TITLES	AUTHORS	LANGUAGES	PUBLISHERS
1	Kanuya wale 1 (Dajuru), novel	Sanba Ŋare	**Bamanankan**	**EDIS**
2	Kanuya wale 2 (Parantikɛ), novel			
3	Kanuya wale 3 (Firiyatɔw), novel			
4	Masasi, play			
5	Ntomokun, play			
6	Pate mo Dinngama (1, 2, 3), novel	Sammba Tarawore	**Fulfulde**	
7	Jilli 1 (Welahoore)	Sammba Ŋaare		
8	Jilli 2 (Amparanti)			
9	Jilli 3 (Debbo mo saaya bulabula)			
10	Yoppaaɓe	Sammba Ŋaare Ali Zorome, Mamadu H Balo		
11	Baayan allaahidu 1 (Meefuray), novel	Sanba Ŋare	**Soŋay**	
12	Baayan allaahidu 2 (Aparantoo), novel			
13	Baayan allaahidu 3 (Woyoo kan goo goraara), novel			
14	I funadi, story	Samba Niare, Ali Zorome, Mahamadi H Balo		
15	Gɛnkuruni, epic	Adama Jɔkolo Kulubali	**Syenara**	
16	Sipyire, play	Sanba Ŋare		
17	Fanhatulugo, play			
18	Luuzu Mamare, stories	Job Thera		
19	Ntaannama kale (1, 2, 3)	Sanba Ŋare		

20	Ɲaturroo, story	Adama Jɔkolo Kulubali		
21	Kataha	Sanba Ɲare, Ali Zorome		
22	Ŋɔhɔngɔ, short stories	Orokiyatu Kuyate		
23	Dangamaanu do Tungutuhun, stories and puzzles	Banjugu S. Daraame	**Soninké**	**SIL-Mali**
24	Fonnaqayaaxun do saafariye			
25	Karangandi: Soninke Yexun (Kitaabe 1, 2), marriage	Madi Kaama Musundo		
26	Tunmundi: Kallengoraaxu (1,2,3), cousinage			
27	Baaraago a do Xiiso Tananu			
28	SelinkeƝi Xiisa, stories	Alaji Muusa Jaabi, Mahamadu Madiheeri Jaabi		
29	Taalin Kitaabe, proverbs	Buubu Yaamadu Tunkara		
30	Gansoyi Xiisa	Duwa Fofana		
31	Gori Xiisa, stories	Sanba Ɲaxale Dukure		
32	Bani Ŋɛnɛma, poetry	Fode Moussa Sidibé	**Bamanankan**	**EDIS**
33	Forokɔrɔ Moriba, poetry			
34	Siya Manbi, poetry			
35	Jammba, 2007, (novel)	Demba Aboubacar Paamanta	**Fulfulde**	**Toguna**
36	Barmere 2, 2006, (novel)			
37	Barmere 1, 2005, (novel)			
38	Beldi Maasina, 2004, (stories)			

39	A hin wãran-Atwãjrãh	Sãnba Nyare, Ali Zorome, Mamadu H Balo	**Tamãsãyt**	**EDIS**
40	Faraŋ Maka Boote, epic	Yousssouf M. Haïdara, I. Sango	**Soŋay**	
41	Tooya farru, stories			
42	Faatuma ardo, stories			
43	Hammadi Sina, stories			
44	Alarbaa Cijinoo, short stories	Mahammadu B. Mayga		
45	Maalaɲinikaba (Kani ka furuko)	Seyidu Bajan	**Bamanankan**	**Harmattan**
46	Sunjata Manden Janjon	Jibirili Tamisiri Nani		
47	Ji ani jilabanaw	Namakan Keita, Ismaïla Samba		**La Sahélienne**
48	Ji ani jilabanaw	Mulayi Tarawele, Zakaria Tarawele		
49	N'dogoni Nabi			
50	Sufe kɔnɔni			
51	Kayi ni waraba fileso sogow	Brian James		
52	Kurumari Tariki	Sumayila Sanba Tarawele		
53	Maya ni Taya			
54	Hinɛ Nana, essay			
55	Na jo ni na nu wu ni (Talking with My Mum),	Nwanne Felix-Emeribe	**Mamara**	**SIL-Mali**
56	Zanhana ni nɔgɔlɛ wu,			
57	Ɲɛɲɛkɔrɔ ka Tonnkan (1 2 3 4), epic	Jeli Jafe	**Bamanankan**	**EDIS**
58	Genkurunin (1,2), epic			
59	Tabusire (1,2), epic	Mamadu Daramani Tarawele		
60	Ɲakurunin, epic	Adama Jɔkolo Kulubali		

61	Kelennabila, epic	Sanba Ɲare, Ali Zororne, Mamadu H Balo		
62	Jaahe, poetry	Lawale Siyaka		**Prostyle**
63	Kuma yen Kuunjiɛnkɛrɛbɛ Jiɛpɔ mɔɲɔn, stories	Haaji Karabenta	**Bozo**	**SIL-Mali**
64	Taalin Kitaabe, proverbs	Buubu Yaamadu Tunkara	**Soninké**	**SIL-Mali**
65	Musow Ni Wale, novel	Fatumata Kulubali	**Bamanankan**	**Donniya**
66	Ngonikoro bama	Karimu Jalo; Basiriki Ture		
67	Ngonikoro bama	Musa Jabi		**Jamana**
68	Siyakaba, autobiography	Sumayila Sanba Tarawele		
69	Yirimanikongo	Seyidu bakari dunbiya		
70	Masadenin	Bukari jara		
71	Masakɛnma na n'a denkɛ jugu	Mahamadu Niakate		
72	Wagadu fo Sudan	Mariyamu M. Sisoko		
73	Maden Buruju			
74	Kɛko ye fɔko ye	Berehima Wulale		**La Sahélienne**

Furthermore, to know the interest of Malians in our languages, we conducted interviews with 10 individuals, including writers, publishers, and language researchers associated with AMALAN, with a focus on investigations carried out in our mother tongues for the assessment of readership.

Lastly, we developed questionnaires tailored for university students at FLSL. The questionnaires were designed to gather comprehensive data on these key aspects: seeking to understand their proficiency in reading books in their mother tongues, awareness of literary productions in Malian languages, and their reading regarding books written in their respective mother tongues or other national languages in Mali.

Table 2: Student reading assessment

Languages	Reading Proficiency	Knowledge of Works	Readers of Works
Bamanankan	38	13	8
Fulfulde	5	2	2
Soŋoy	3	0	0
Syenara	2	1	0
Soninké	2	2	2
Dɔgɔsɔ	4	1	1
Maninkakan	2	0	0
Mamara	1	1	0
Total	**57**	**21**	**13**
03 people are unable to read or write in our languages.			
Respondents: 60 students			

3.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the light of the data collected in the publishing houses, there are not many literary productions in our languages representing, exclusively, the work of national and international publishing houses. Most of the productions are, among others, lexicons, textbooks, but especially booklets for children. An example is SIL-Mali, which has published textbooks for children in almost all of Mali's mother tongues. As for literary productions such as novels, plays, and essays, they are rare in many of our national languages. Nevertheless, in the eight publishing houses, we have listed 74 literary works, which are, among others, novels, plays, historical narratives, autobiographies, essays, proverbs, and tales. These works are produced in eight (08) of the thirteen (13) languages which are Bamanankan (35), Fulfulde (8), Soninké (10), Soŋoy (09), Syenara (08), Bozo (01), Mamara (02), and Tamãsãyt (01). Unfortunately, we did not have data in Dɔgɔsɔ, Hassanya, Bomu, Xaasongaxango, and Maninkakan.

Authors, publishers, and researchers generally concur that there is a prevailing lack of interest among Malians in reading literature written in our national languages.

From the statistical evidence collected from the 60 students, 57 can read in the following languages: Bamanankan, Fulfulde, Soŋoy, Syenara, Soninké, Dɔgɔsɔ, Maninkakan, and Mamara, 3 cannot read; 21 are aware of the existence of literary works produced in our languages and 13 have read them. Only 7.8% of these 60 students have read in our languages.

3.4 Key Findings

To begin with, the data indicate a lack of enthusiasm among the majority of students towards reading in our national languages. Surprisingly, a significant portion of them are unaware of the existence of literary productions in these languages. This observation echoes the sentiments expressed by Hans, who contends that reading has not been deeply integrated into the cultural fabric of many African nations. The educational paradigms enforced during colonization further exacerbated this issue, as reading was primarily regarded as a solemn pursuit rather than a source of leisure (Hans, 1984). Regrettably, this trend persists to date. Additionally, there is a consensus among authors, publishers, and language researchers specializing in Malian languages that there is limited interest among Malians in reading literature written in our national languages. Mori Traoré, the translator of works such as *Sous l'Orage*[4] and *Soundjata An Epic of Old Mali* into Bamanankan respectively *Maalaninikaba* (*Kani ka furuko*) and *Sunjata Manden Janjon*, underscores the relatively low readership and the constrained dedication to literary endeavors in national languages. In the interview, Mori expressed uncertainty regarding the extent of readership, suggesting that it is minimal. He states: "I cannot say how many people read. I believe that there are very few". Similarly, the author of *Barmere* 1 and 2 noted a lack of widespread interest despite receiving inquiries about the availability of their work. Directors of publishing houses, such as EDIS and La Sahélienne, attribute the limited utilization of national languages to the low interest shown by Malians. Finally, researchers at AMALAN share similar perspectives, with the Assistant Director of Production acknowledging the underdeveloped literary environment and the scant readership of literary works among Malians. One teacher-researcher at AMALAN attributes this trend to the increasing preference for visual and auditory media over habitual reading, alongside the failure of literary works in national languages to address the concerns of readers effectively.

As recommendations, the decision-makers should:

- Increase investment in national languages to enhance the infrastructure for translating and reproducing documents in these languages.

[4] Caught in the rain

- Launch a comprehensive awareness campaign targeting key stakeholders and traditional authorities.
- Establish a robust book policy to support the development and dissemination of literature in national languages.
- Incorporate literature written in national languages into educational curricula at all levels. This not only exposes students to indigenous literature but also fosters a sense of cultural pride and identity.
- Ensure easy access to literary works in national languages through libraries, bookstores, and online platforms. Efforts should be made to make these resources readily available and affordable.
- Provide support and incentives for authors who write in national languages, including grants, publishing assistance, and recognition. This can encourage more writers to produce works in national languages.
- Encourage community involvement in promoting reading in national languages through book clubs, reading circles, and literary festivals.
- Embrace innovative approaches such as digital storytelling, audiobooks, and interactive platforms to make literature in national languages more engaging and accessible to a wider audience, particularly younger generations.
- Continuously research to understand readership patterns, preferences, and barriers to access, and use this information to refine and adapt promotional strategies accordingly.

By implementing these recommendations, the stakeholders can work towards revitalizing the readership of literature in Malian national languages, thereby preserving cultural heritage, fostering literacy, and promoting inclusive and diverse literary landscapes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there exists a political will to promote, popularize, and produce literary works in our languages. However, this determination has yet to be manifested in tangible actions. With the enhanced recognition of our official languages, there is an expectation for an increase in literary works and academic research to complement their elevated status. This would enable their integration and utilization in the same way as French, as advocated by Malians. But for this to be a reality, high interest should be given to these languages' literacy. Some writers, despite limited readers and benefits, still continue to write. Strategies and policies need to be developed and implemented to increase Malian languages readership. More readers there are,

more literary works will be produced and the adaptation of these now official languages as “working languages" would be easier.

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