THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN LANGUAGES AS MEDIUMS OF INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Report compiled by the Ministerial Committee appointed by the Ministry of Education in September 2003

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.   The Ministerial Committee to advise on the development of African (indigenous) languages[1] as mediums of instruction in higher education was established on 27 November 2003. This was the result of a commitment made in the Language Policy for Higher Education (2002), in which four major issues are addressed. These issues concern the languages of instruction, the future of South African languages as fields of academic study and research, the study of foreign languages and, lastly, the promotion of multilingualism in the institutional policies and practices of institutions of higher education. The Language Policy for Higher Education was well received by higher education institutions. At the time the Minister called to mind the challenge facing higher education to ensure the simultaneous development of a multilingual environment in which all South African languages would be developed to their full capacity while at the same time ensuring that the existing languages of instruction did not form a barrier to access and success.

2.   This report serves as a basis for the policy framework proposed by the then Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, towards the development, from the immediate to the medium and long term, of the South African official languages, other than English and Afrikaans, for use as mediums of instruction in higher education. Once the framework has been accepted, a detailed plan may be developed recommending the enabling conditions and institutional arrangements that could sustain policy implementation at various levels, from national and regional to institutional level. Similarly, recommendations would also be made on the full financial implications of the plan.

3.   Within our mandate, we have investigated both the historical and current contexts of the language issue in South Africa. We begin by

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[1] In the context of this report, the expression "indigenous African languages" refers to the nine official languages specified in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996.

presenting an outline of the historical background of the complex, and rather fraught, relationship between language and society in Africa. This outline spans the pre-colonial phase in which African languages functioned autonomously in their respective social contexts. It also reflects the colonial, in particular, the missionary influence on African languages in which we witnessed the growth of English and Afrikaans in South Africa, resulting in the marginalisation of the indigenous African languages.

4.   In the current context, we pay particular attention to the range of environmental conditions that could either enable or impede the growth of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction at higher education level. In particular, we examine the conditions that have promoted and sustained language growth, focusing by way of example on those societies deemed to have had successful language histories. We also consider the societies that have successfully resuscitated their marginalised national languages.

5.   We also draw attention to the vast infrastructure of language development that South Africa has built up over the years, which can now be relied upon as a structural foundation for the sustainability of the project at hand.

6.   Emanating from our deliberations is our strong view that a crisis is looming in South Africa regarding the preservation, maintenance and associated identity of our indigenous African languages. The strong preference for English instead of African languages in all the formal sectors of society, both private and public, continues unabated in general social practice. Even in institutions of higher learning which are the focus of this current project, investment – both human and financial – in the teaching and study of African languages shows a declining trend. Departments of African Languages are closing down because student numbers have fallen drastically. The future of the indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction is bleak unless a long-range plan is devised that could be implemented as a concerted effort over the next two to three decades.

7.	Finally, we make recommendations that are intended to reverse a situation we have found alarming. According to current estimates, there are about 6 000 languages in the world and about half of these will cease to exist in the next 50 years. It is disconcerting to deduce from these statistics that on average a language becomes extinct every two weeks somewhere in the world (Crystal, 1999:1). A pessimistic view found in the literature is that only 600 languages stand a fair chance of surviving in the long run. It is therefore incumbent on South Africa to do its best to ensure, in terms of our Constitution, the continued existence of all the languages that form part and parcel of its full heritage.

8.	Some recommendations deal with the impact that globalisation, westernisation and unequal technological development have had on our local languages. These recommendations have short, medium and long-term implications. The ultimate goal in the context of a long-range strategic plan is a South Africa whose citizens take pride in being multilingual and who regard their South Africanness as embracing linguistic diversity.

9.	The Ministerial Committee held a total of six meetings, including two additional dedicated subcommittee working sessions, and conducted research to investigate, determine and highlight the issues related to our terms of reference. The committee members would like to reiterate that, unless urgent measures are taken, South Africa's indigenous languages are under serious threat. In this regard, recent policy advances in South Africa present a historic opportunity to restore enduring legitimacy and dignity to our indigenous languages. Sustained commitment to sound policy implementation over the next two to three decades should ensure success.

10.	The committee is expected, in the first instance, to advise the Minister of Education on a framework for the development of indigenous languages for use as mediums of instruction in higher education. Such a framework should, among other things, address the following:

10.1 Criteria for the selection of languages to be developed for use in higher education. This may require an assessment of the current usage of indigenous languages in higher education.

10.2 The number of languages that should be earmarked for development, and the identification of the academic disciplines or fields of study for the use of the earmarked languages.

10.3 An identification of the key areas which will require attention, such as the compilation of dictionaries, teaching and learning materials and staff development.

10.4 The institutional arrangements required for the implementation of the framework, including the respective responsibilities of higher education institutions and the government.

Composition of the Ministerial Committee

11. The Ministerial Committee comprises the following members:
   ♦ Professor N S Ndebele, Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Town (Chair)
   ♦ Professor Rosalie Finlayson, Pan South African Language Board
   ♦ Ms Thandiwe January Mclean, Deputy Director-General for Language, Culture and Society in the Department of Arts and Culture
   ♦ Dr Cassius Lubisi, Adviser to the Minister of Education
   ♦ Professor R. Madadzhe, University of the North
   ♦ Professor Sihawukele Ngubane, Head of Undergraduate Studies in the Faculty of Human Sciences, University of Natal
   ♦ Dr Abner Nyamende, Chairperson, African Languages Association of Southern Africa
   ♦ Ms N. Tsheole, Member of Parliament

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

12.   The African continent has some 2 035 indigenous African languages
        (Heine & Nurse, 2000:1) and this total represents nearly one-third of
        the world's languages. The languages of Africa are classified into four
        major groups: Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo and KhoiSan.
        The complex spectrum of the indigenous languages of South Africa is a
        family of languages comprising an estimated 1 436 languages
        (Williamson & Blench, 2000), which fall in the Niger-Congo group,
        although some of the languages spoken in South Africa also come
        from the KhoiSan group.

13.   Africa's languages therefore reflect a rich tapestry of cultures which, by
        definition, particularly in contemporary Africa, strongly suggests that
        intercultural communication should be one of the central pillars of the
        development policy in the African Union.

14.   For the purposes of this report, it suffices to say that the languages in
        pre-colonial Africa were successful modes of communication for
        meeting the range of societal needs. As the sole mediums of
        socialisation, indigenous languages coped more than adequately with
        facilitating communication about all relevant topics, not only internally
        within integral societies but also across the boundaries internal and
        external to the respective language communities. Traditional societies
        with their indigenous knowledge systems were able to accumulate
        knowledge and to interpret it across critical areas of knowledge, such
        as astronomy, medicine, philosophy and history, and then passed this
        knowledge on to subsequent generations through language.

15.   No one knows how events might have turned out if Europe had not
        colonised Africa. But the colonisation did occur, and had mixed results.
        At the heart of the often brutal Europe-Africa colonial interface was the
        strong introduction of literacy to Africa. Although some parts of Africa
        had developed literacy, this had not flourished beyond some powerful

socially élite groups. It took the more robust technical advances of Europe to democratise literacy.

16.   Nonetheless, Gerard (1981:173) observes that "cultural contact with western Europe affected literatures that had been in existence centuries before the white man made his presence felt in sub-Saharan Africa". Thus oral literature, which lies at the heart of African cultural life as it had carried the indigenous languages and culture from generation to generation, was undermined when written literature from the west was introduced. This nascent literary culture developed in parallel to the indigenous one, and became the beneficiary of directed colonial policy. In the course of time the literary culture outstripped the indigenous culture and unequal relations of power between the two were established and have persisted to this day.

17.   The last statement is important as it underscores the point that, although western print technology had enormous potential to democratise literacy, the colonial dispensation did not significantly democratise literacy beyond the relatively small African socially élite groups this dispensation had created for its own purposes.

18.   It is clear that the colonial period sought to replace indigenous African culture with European culture, but this process did not entirely succeed. That is why today we have both cultures entrenched in Africa, albeit unequally. It is equally clear that it would be unrealistic to embark on a full-scale counter-project to remove the European cultural presence in Africa in order to restore indigenous African culture. This realisation, however, leads to a potentially powerful insight, namely we have to find an integrative principle that will enrich this bipolar legacy over time. The goal is to evolve, through clear policy, fully functioning African languages and fully functioning English and Afrikaans, as we achieve a multilingual national identity in which we successfully replace bipolarity with multilingual versatility. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, a Finnish sociolinguist (1995, 1996) makes a fascinating connection between multilingual versatility and social intelligence. We can only imagine what multiple, cross-language influences could do to enrich the sense

of a new South African identity. The universal democratisation of literacy will be at the heart of the crystallisation of such an identity.

Indigenous languages in education

19.   The concept of the medium of instruction refers to the language used for teaching the basic curriculum of the educational system. There may be one or more language/s of instruction in any system, depending on the need for and the prevalence of the language/s.

20.   The use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction is referred to as bilingual and/or multilingual education. In a number of cases the languages of instruction are often the official or majority languages. Speaking a mother tongue (or having a home language) that is not one of the official languages or a local language of a country is often a disadvantage for the learner in an educational system. The effectiveness of the educational experience is seriously limited for a learner who receives education in a foreign language.

21.   By contrast, mother-tongue instruction refers to the use of learners' mother tongue as medium of instruction. UNESCO (2003:15) describes the term "mother tongue" as follows:

> The language[s] that one has learnt first; the language[s] one identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others; the language[s] one knows best and the language[s] one uses most.

22.   The medium of instruction, therefore, refers to the general manner in which an instructional offering is provided so that effective learning can take place. Studies have shown that instruction in the mother tongue is beneficial to language competence in the first language, achievement in other subject areas and training in a second language (UNESCO 2003). Mother-tongue instruction is effective when there is appropriate terminology for education purposes and sufficient resource materials; when there are appropriately trained teachers available and when learners, educators and parents are willing. An important question that should be answered is whether appropriate teaching materials and an

extensive vocabulary are available to achieve the goal of mother-tongue instruction. Though all nine of the indigenous African languages now have visible – though brief – literary histories in the form of novels, drama and poetry, dictionaries and terminology lists, they lag far behind English and Afrikaans in the areas of modern terminology and registers.

23. Language Boards for each language were established in 1955, to act as the custodians of each respective language, to uphold its standard form and ensure the so-called purity of the language. These Language Boards also had the power to recommend or disqualify any prescribed books and, as instruments of government, their recommendations were expected to screen out any material deemed undesirable for political or other reasons. It is understandable why, in the political context of their establishment, the Language Boards were largely viewed as divisive and extremely detrimental to the promotion and use of the indigenous African languages, particularly in the field of education.

24. This situation within Higher Education was also not conducive to the progressive development of indigenous languages. For example, indigenous languages have until recently been studied as scientific phenomena through the medium of English rather than as vital embodiments of living social and individual experience. Research indicates that this situation has changed radically in recent years. At most institutions of higher learning in South Africa today, the indigenous languages are now taught through their own medium, except for language acquisition classes.

25. The point of this section is to establish a more explicit link between the notion of "medium of instruction" and the challenge to higher education to ensure the effectiveness of the educational experience as well as contribute to the attainment of a vibrant multilingual society in South Africa. Higher education is the point where the public, private and civil society sectors crucially intersect. Its multilayered impact on South Africa's ability to achieve a functioning and sustainable multilingual society is potentially enormous. South Africa's higher education has to

be given a clear mandate to rise to the challenge. This mandate should arise from the premise that the achievement of multilingualism in South Africa is far from being an unrealistic ideal and a sentimental hankering for the past. On the contrary, it is one of the primary conditions to be met for a successful multicultural society.

CONDITIONS THAT SUSTAIN LANGUAGE GROWTH

26.	The likelihood that higher education will succeed in this task is enhanced when we assess the variety of conditions that ought to exist to sustain language growth in comparison to the magnitude of the challenge envisaged. The picture that emerges suggests that South Africans have moved far more in the multilingual direction than they are prepared to acknowledge. We single out the following conditions as being significantly conducive to the successful use of South Africa's neglected indigenous languages, not only as mediums of instruction but also for their more enhanced use in the public domain:

♦	Extent of literacy in the languages

♦	Official recognition of languages

♦	Use of languages in education

♦	Existence of a robust intellectual culture

♦	Use of languages in electronic technology

♦	Languages as an economic resource

♦	Reinforcement by international best practice.

27.	When speakers of a particular language acquire the ability to read and write it, and can use it to meet the widest possible range of their needs, this contributes immensely to the growth of that language.

28.	Where languages enjoy official recognition they are likely to grow and exist for a long time to come. Eric Mamer (cited in Hill, 2004:1), spokesperson on administrative reform for the European Union (EU) emphasises that respect for multilingualism by the EU has endorsed the identity of each member of the EU.

29. This trend is not only confined to Europe, but also finds resonance in Africa where official recognition and use of some languages in Africa such as Shona in Zimbabwe, Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania, and Nyanja in Malawi, has led to the revitalisation of these languages. It is generally accepted that the constitutional recognition of South Africa's eleven official languages has significantly contributed to national reconciliation at a formal level. Clearly, the next challenge is to deepen and extend the use of the previously neglected indigenous languages in the daily life of South Africa's citizens. The entire schooling system, including higher education, has a cardinal role to play in this regard.

30. When learners and educators use a particular language to acquire education, it contributes largely to the growth of such a language since this step promotes the provision of resources such as funding, books, electronic technology and physical infrastructure. First-language teaching and learning –

    ♦ gives learners a stronger sense of identity;

    ♦ facilitates higher-level learning for students;

    ♦ has been proven, especially in the early years of a child's education, to be more effective in the educational process than the use of some other language (Mzamane, Saadawi & Ngugi, 2000:2); and

    ♦ provides a positive and non-threatening environment for students.

31. Technology is now a pervasive and indispensable element in people's daily lives. The profound impact of computer technology on social and economic development is a dominant feature of contemporary life and is bound to be one of the key drivers of human progress in the 21st century. The indigenous African languages currently being used by the vast majority of South Africans should develop a vocabulary that could significantly enhance the participation of all South Africa's citizens in a technology-based and knowledge-based economy. The Harare Declaration (1997) calls upon all of Africa to promote technological discourse in their national languages to address the challenges of the new millennium (Mutasa, 2002: 240).

32. In seeking to re-centre in the active national consciousness our marginalised indigenous African languages, we should heed the lessons learned in other countries. For example, in Wales the efforts to revitalise the Welsh language have been successful, similarly in Belgium with Flemish, in Israel with Hebrew and in Ireland with Gaelic. These languages have been introduced into higher education institutions as mediums of teaching and learning with increasing success. French was disappearing 20 years ago in Quebec, Canada, but the provincial government passed laws requiring its use in certain places, adopted immigration policies that favoured French speakers and even ran an advertising campaign stating, in effect, "French is cool" (Steele, 2003:2).

33. Of course, the scale of the challenge in South Africa is of a different order. The countries referred to above are not as culturally and linguistically diverse as South Africa. This diversity has a significant impact on South Africa's capacity to deploy state resources for comparable time frames, especially under the current levels of economic growth. Yet the methods of intervention, given appropriately adjusted short, medium and long-term time frames, and an appropriate plan of action, remain worthy of attention.

34. In Africa the matter of international experience takes on added significance and urgency from the perspective that "apartheid language policies also resulted in the development of the indigenous languages of South Africa in isolation from their sister languages in other parts of the continent" (Finlayson & Madiba, 2002:44). Prah (1995:82) notes further: "[T] he development of languages such as the Nguni languages, which are spoken in several countries though called by different names, would require closer cooperation between South Africa and countries such as Tanzania, Zambia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe where Nyamwezi, Lozi, Swati and Ndebele are spoken respectively."

35. The failure to establish closer cooperation among neighbouring countries has now been identified as one of the measures to be

addressed in the African renaissance initiative that is slowly gaining momentum through the New Programme for Africa's Development, NEPAD. In pursuing "a New Global Partnership" NEPAD endorses "the process of reconstructing the identity and self-confidence of the peoples of Africa" and it furthermore maintains that "it is necessary that this be understood and valued by Africans themselves". Having noted the "need to help promote" the indigenous languages, the Office of the President of the Republic of Mali on 19 December 2000 set up a structure called the Mission for the Academy of Languages (MACALAN) to look into the feasibility of establishing an academy of African languages. It has since been recommended that the prospective Academy of African Languages (ACALAN) should be constituted as part of the African Union (AU). Such a move would assist initiatives to foster the intellectualisation of the African languages.

36. Certainly, these international precedents support and encourage the roles currently being played by both the Department of Arts and Culture, in particular the National Language Service, as well as the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), in their quest to promote multilingualism and develop the indigenous languages of South Africa. Acting as champions of the project to develop indigenous African languages, these bodies galvanise multilateral energies to forge the partnership arrangements essential for the promotion of multilingualism. PanSALB's substructures, in the form of National Language Bodies (NLBs), National Lexicography Units (NLUs) and Provincial Language Committees (PLCs) have all been established to aid the empowerment of the indigenous African languages. A number of thriving associations are also concerned about the promotion and development of the African languages, such as the African Language Association of Southern Africa (ALASA) and the All African Languages Re-Development Institute of Southern Africa (AALRDISA).

37. Lastly, consistency in legislation is a crucial aspect of the conditions that promote language growth. We know, for example, that section 6 of

the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) gives recognition to 11 official languages, thereby elevating nine indigenous African languages to official status. The Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) creates conditions for and promotes the development and use of all the official languages as well as the Khoi, Nama and San languages. Significantly, the Constitution acknowledges the right of citizens to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public education institutions "where that education is reasonably practicable". The National Education Policy Act (NEPA), Act No. 27 of 1996, further recognises the right of every student to be instructed in the language of his or her choice, once again, where this is reasonably practicable. The South African Schools Act (SASA), Act No. 84 of 1996 guides the implementation of language rights at school level and gives the School Governing Bodies the powers to determine the language policy of a school.

37.1 Another important piece of legislation is the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) which is based on the principle of additive bilingualism. Additive bilingualism promotes the maintenance of the home language(s) while "providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s)" (p.3). The home language is therefore not dropped in favour of another language but maintained together with the additional language/s. A fundamentally important aspect of this policy is that it recognises the correlation between language and the cognitive development of learners. The policy appears to adopt a position that supports the role of additive bilingualism, thus creating an enabling environment for the development of the African languages.

37.2 The commitment to multilingualism in this policy is also reflected in the norms and standards regarding language policy, in which the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are required to stipulate how their schools are planning to promote multilingualism: (a) through using more than one Language of Learning and

Teaching (LoLT); and/or (b) by offering additional languages as fully fledged subjects.

37.3 Notwithstanding that LiEP gives the individual the right to choose the language of learning, this right is subject to its meeting the overall framework's obligation for the education system to promote multilingualism. How this right is to be reconciled with the provisions of the Schools Act, which gives the SGBs powers to decide the language policy of their schools, remains a critical challenge and can be construed as a loophole which may be subject to abuse. In other words, SGBs might not take into consideration the interests of the learner and instead, for any number of reasons, might decide on other priorities. One may think that the power to decide the language policy is vested too much in a single body, especially when the decision is not only about multilingualism but is also a human rights issue. These are matters that still have to be resolved. The point here is that the legal context is essential to language development.

37.4 Overall, the existing policy framework comprising the five pieces of legislation mentioned above, could be regarded as an adequate enabling environment for the introduction of multilingualism and multilingual practices in higher education. However, the fact that the right to receive education in the learner's language of choice can only be accessed if it is "reasonably practicable" is a limitation, since it leaves the door open to abuse. Furthermore, the emphasis on learning at least two languages, which is evident in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), even though there is an option of learning a second additional language, could be interpreted as favouring bilingualism over multilingualism.

37.5 Clearly, for establishing an enabling policy environment, there should be synergy between the various pieces of legislation. The concerns referred to above should be addressed to reduce the possibility of exploitation.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING LANGUAGES FOR USE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

38.   In accordance with the prevailing legislative framework, each institution of higher education is required to establish its own language policy, guided by the Constitution and the Language Policy for Higher Education. This latter policy addresses, as already indicated, the following four major issues: languages of instruction; the future of South African languages as fields of academic study and research; the study of foreign languages; and the promotion of multilingualism in the institutional policies and practices of higher education institutions.

39.   Provincial language policies will set the framework for the higher education institutions falling in each region of the country. This means that although higher education is a national responsibility, higher education institutions are required in certain respects to abide by regional constitutional requirements. What is needed is a framework which would enable institutions to make choices and determine priorities.

40.   Firstly, there is the matter of the distribution of languages across South Africa. According to the Census data of 2001, isiZulu has the highest number of speakers (23,8%) followed by isiXhosa with 17,6%. Afrikaans with 13,3% speakers is the next highest with SeSotho sa Leboa with 9,4% (Census, 2001:14): XiTsonga, SiSwati, TshiVenda and isiNdebele with only 1,6% each, have the smallest concentration of speakers. Of course this reflects the total national figures. The figures do not reflect the actual distribution of languages in the provinces and in the institutions of higher education.

41.   Though XiTsonga, SiSwati, TshiVenda and isiNdebele may have the smallest distribution nationally, these languages have a significantly greater distribution in the regions where they are respectively concentrated. Policy may therefore benefit significant regional distribution while simultaneously balancing such a necessary bias with

the need to empower provincial citizens with linguistic ability in one or more of the languages that are statistically, economically and socially more widely distributed nationally. This would not only meet a practical requirement to assist South Africans who love to travel and who insist on staying wherever they like in this country, but would also engender national awareness through active multilingualism. In this regard, if speakers of isiZulu, for example, have a low distribution in Limpopo, there may be good policy reasons for teaching the language in schools up to a determined minimum level in that province. Similarly, for the same reasons, SeSotho could be taught up to a determined minimum level in KwaZulu-Natal. We have a similar situation in the Western Cape where a small but resilient community of SeSotho speakers suggests that it would make good sense to require SeSotho to be taught in the region up to a determined minimum level of schooling.

42. We propose as a principle that where, for example, the national distribution of the Nguni and Sotho language groups is clearly statistically significant, serious consideration should be given to making a language in the Sotho language category a requirement up to a determined minimum level of schooling in a predominantly Nguni region, and vice versa.

43. What this picture may suggest is that where an indigenous African language has a significant statistical distribution at regional level, institutions of higher learning in a particular region could reasonably invest in the development of that language as a medium of instruction over time. If, for any number of unanticipated historical reasons, that language does not become an effective medium of instruction, much would have been done in any event to develop it significantly. What this means is that although a language may not in the long run become a medium of instruction (and at present we are unable to predict such an outcome), this is not a good enough reason for absolving provinces or institutions from being required to adopt a serious policy regarding an indigenous official language and make plans to develop that language.

44.   If we compare the statistical distribution of the indigenous African languages at national and regional level with the actual language enrolments in South Africa's public institutions of higher education, this brings into stark relief the alarm we expressed earlier in this report about the danger facing our indigenous languages. The 2000 data in the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) indicated that of the 605 495 students enrolled at universities and technikons in 2000, English had not unexpectedly the highest number of enrolments, comprising 32% of the total. IsiZulu and isiXhosa jointly comprised 22% but the other indigenous languages recorded 6% and less. The number of student enrolments in official indigenous African languages at universities and technikons has recorded a dramatic decline of about 50% since 1999.

45.   Clearly, if higher education is indeed located at the intersection between the public, private, and civil society sectors, then it is cause for serious concern that higher education currently has a minimal ability to provide society with citizens who have a working competence in indigenous languages in a competitive contemporary environment. This inability fundamentally threatens the long-term goals of national reconciliation and may fester into a potentially destabilising national sore two to three decades from now. It is not an unlikely scenario that, as South Africa continues to build a strong black middle-class with as low a competency in African languages as it now has, one generation in the next 10 to 20 years may become so culturally alienated that elements from among the élite themselves might call for a fundamental change in the cultural condition of the state in ways that would be potentially destabilising. Successful planning should foresee such a scenario and plan either to prevent it, or to manage it.

46.   The earliest written records of the South African indigenous languages date back to the 18th century. The first text, a short isiXhosa wordlist, was compiled by a Swedish traveller, Andrew Sparrman, in 1776. Subsequently, following the steady arrival of missionaries, many more wordlists were compiled as printing presses were established. The

early transcription of African languages by missionaries pioneered modern scholarship in those languages. The most famous of the early publishing initiatives were the Lovedale Press in the Eastern Cape, the Morija Press in Lesotho and the Marianhill Press in Natal. Accordingly, the modern growth of African languages was uneven, depending on the arrival of missionary activity and the degree and intensity of the missionaries' investment in developing them. As a result, the languages were not only reduced to writing but indigenous language speakers were also educated and trained by the missionaries, and continued the work into the future.

47. In view of such a history, a careful assessment should be made of what further investment and the direction of innovation would be required for any particular language selected for development as a medium of instruction. The comparative strengths of respective languages would have to be carefully calibrated as a basis for strategic decisions. The second stage of the Ministerial Committee's work would include determining the relative strengths of each language in accordance with the historical quantity and usage of textbooks, novels, poetry, drama, dictionaries, newspapers and the extent of newspaper readership; the number of active researchers, teachers and writers, including journalists; and the lobbying infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

48. In making our recommendations we invoke the national motto: !KE E: /XARRA //KE. Also, it is clear that the objective of developing the official indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction in higher education would require a systemic undergirding of the entire schooling system and the enhanced public and social use of these languages in the daily lives of South Africans. It is important to retain this context.

    48.1 The official indigenous African languages should, in terms of the Constitution, retain and deepen their official status. We make

this point not only for emphasis, but also to underscore at all times the historic significance of our Constitution as a living document. Sustaining these languages is a national imperative.

48.2   As the Constitution conveys a full awareness of the complexity of implementation, it is clear that there would have to be a coordinated, long-range national plan that would work at national, provincial and local level to provide adequate resources and support for indigenous African languages. Equally so, the public structures that deal with language matters, such as PanSALB, the NLS and African Language Associations, should be consolidated further and be supported, maintained and monitored. However, the ultimate responsibility rests with the national Government.

48.3   We recommend that each higher education institution should, in the context of the official status of the relevant indigenous language, apply the following regional and locality-specific criteria in its selection of one or more indigenous African languages to be developed for use in higher education. In addition, each institution could use these criteria to formulate a framework that would enable it to make choices and determine priorities, such as:

48.3.1   Regional and locality-specific criteria

48.3.2   Concentration of speakers and students

48.3.3   Availability of expertise

48.3.4   Availability of infrastructure

48.3.5   Affordability

48.3.6   Possible linkages and partnerships with English and Afrikaans

48.3.7   Economic, social and political significance of courses.

Furthermore, each institution would have to develop an implementation framework based on short, medium and long-term objectives.

48.4 A communicative competence in at least one indigenous African language should be a legal requirement for a person to gain employment and promotion in the public service or any state institution.

48.5 A communicative competence in at least one indigenous African language should be rewarded, particularly in cases where the person's home language is English and/or Afrikaans.

48.6 Higher education institutions, government and the private sector should collaborate in identifying on a regional basis prioritised courses that could be progressively translated into an African language. The strategy should determine which language/s would be targeted in that specific region and who would take responsibility for producing the material, given the expertise in the region. The following outline, based on research conducted by the Ministerial Committee and on information from Statistics South Africa (Census 2001) could be used as a guideline[2]:

<u>Languages</u>	<u>Higher Education Institutions</u>[3]
isiNdebele	Pretoria; Unisa
isiZulu	Johannesburg; KwaZulu-Natal; North West; Unisa; Wits; Zululand
isiXhosa	Cape Town; Fort Hare; Free State; Nelson Mandela Metro; Rhodes; Stellenbosch; Unisa; Western Cape
SeSotho sa Lebowa	The North; Johannesburg; Pretoria; Unisa; Venda
SeSotho	Cape Town; Free State; Stellenbosch; Unisa; Wits
SeTswana	North-West; Pretoria; Unisa
SiSwati	Unisa; Zululand
TshiVenda	The North; Unisa; Venda

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[2] This includes the new universities of technology and comprehensives.
[3] At the time of writing this report, some institutions were engaged in merging and changing, and would henceforth have different names.

XiTsonga   The North; Unisa; Venda

48.7   The above recommendation should be read in conjunction with paragraph 42 in which we propose as a principle that where, for example, where the national distribution between Nguni and Sotho language groups is clearly statistically significant, serious consideration should be given to making a language in the Sotho language category a requirement up to a determined minimum level of schooling in a predominantly Nguni region, and vice versa.

48.8   Each higher education institution should be required to identify an indigenous African language of its choice for initial development as a medium of instruction. Where the language of choice is a particular regionally dominant language, higher education institutions in that particular region should develop a regional approach. Where an institution specialises in a defined field of study, such specialisation should be determined collectively with neighbouring institutions in a holistic manner. For instance, higher education institutions A, B and C should collectively determine which area of speciality would be targeted and which language would be developed as the medium of instruction, depending on the dominant language/s of the region.

48.9   Funding for research into various aspects of indigenous African language development in terms of these recommendations, particularly in such areas as terminology development, should be part of the strategy of national research funding and be accorded the same magnitude and status as that coordinated through the National Research Foundation.

48.10   Equally, publishing in indigenous African languages in the entire range of publishing areas and materials should be a nationally coordinated activity involving collaboration between higher education institutions and publishers, and may be coordinated by PanSALB.

48.11   Language requirements at primary and secondary schools, including private schools, should ensure language choices in the light of paragraph 41 above.

48.12   Legislation should be reviewed to close the possible loopholes created through phraseology such as "where reasonably practicable".

All these recommendations could only be implemented successfully should they be introduced within a combined stakeholder framework of commitment and driven by a spirit of transformation. Since our tertiary education institutions are on the brink of a new pedagogic dispensation, this stakeholder framework of commitment would have to reflect the following key considerations:

♦ A partnership among all essential public and private sector stakeholder groups and institutions;

♦ a sensitive management and coordination function to be conducted by a statutory body such as PanSALB;

♦ the ongoing and regular monitoring and evaluation of progress;

♦ a level of synergy and complementarity among all three spheres of government in terms of funding as well as other forms of support;

♦ the introduction of an effective set of promotional incentives to encourage and secure the full commitment of stakeholder participation.

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