

ANC NATIONAL LANGUAGE WORKSHOP
27 February 1993

Report from Commission 2: Formulation of a Draft National Language Policy

The Commission, in the brief time available (90 minutes) tried to grapple with the following issues, which had emerged in the course of the morning's discussions:

- 1 Whether or not to "officialise" a particular language or languages.
- 2 The promotion and development of marginalised languages.
- 3 Should English be "stipulated" as an official (or "central") language?
- 4 At what levels should decision-making happen?
- 5 Access to resources.
- 6 What structures are needed? What practices should be promoted?
- 7 What do we mean by multilingualism?
- 8 What are the key areas where language policy is crucial?
- 9 Should we emphasise enforcement? Rewards? Incentives? prevention?
- 10 What language policy ethos should be reflected? What vision should be projected?

The Commission used the Language section of the ANC Policy Guidelines (pp66-67) as another starting point for their work.

The Commission drew up the following report, which is divided into two sections: **Ethos and Implementation Issues:**

Ethos

We must embrace wholeheartedly the South African multilingual reality, which must be perceived as a springboard for development and growth, not as a threat. ANC policy will recognise, protect and develop all South African languages and ensure that all citizens will have access to all spheres of the nation's life; languages which have hitherto been marginalised will be promoted with especial emphasis, and their promotion will be coordinated to ensure national and regional impact. This recognition of all our languages must engender respect for different languages and prevent the use of any language or languages for the purposes of domination or division. ANC language policy will serve to generate a new culture in which linguistic commonality and linguistic diversity are understood without prejudice, and in which the enrichment of languages through contact among their speakers is promoted.

ANC language policy will be based on incentives for individuals and for institutions to pursue multilingual goals, rather than on prescriptive measures.

The government will have the power to designate a single common language as interim needs dictate, to be used for record purposes or for other special use, either at the national level or in the regions, provided that this does not conflict with the right of South Africans to use any South African language of their choice in their dealings with the state.

Implementation Issues

In all implementation issues, labour, education and the media were identified as key areas, though not to the exclusion of other sectors such as health, social services, the civil service or the judicial system.

A pan-language board, rather than institutions specific to particular languages, should ensure that affirmative language action policies are implemented.

Decision-making, for example in education, should take place at subregional level to ensure that language policies are attuned to local linguistic circumstances; the state, however, must ensure that such local policies are not in conflict with (multilingual) constitutional goals.

Policies regarding official language(s) should be encoded in legislation other than the Constitution, in order not to enshrine any language by explicitly giving it Constitutional status.

The state shall provide comprehensive language services, such as translation services and supplementary language learning centres, to ensure that citizens' language rights are respected.

Research into African languages and African culture shall be promoted on an affirmative action basis by state institutions to redress apartheid marginalisation.

The media will be called upon to promote multilingualism by practising it and by portraying the South African multilingual reality.

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