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Arts and Culture elevates indigenous languages through the National Lexicography Units

26 Oct 2015

The eleven South African National Lexicography Units (one per official language) are the structures of state constitutionally and legislatively mandated, in the case of our indigenous languages, to produce dictionaries and other material that will elevate their status and advance their use.

The year 2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the PanSALB Act which saw the establishment of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB).

The Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture, Ms Rejoice Mabudafhasi has been very instrumental in resuscitating the National lexicography Units and also that the launch of the mono-lingual and bi-lingual dictionaries has been her brainchild.

During the celebrations of the International Translation Day, the Deputy Minister officially launched the Human Language Technology tools that simplify and enhance the quality of translation. The tools and monolingual dictionaries will complement each other in elevating the status of indigenous languages.

"This launch re-affirms government's commitment to the promotion of the previously marginalized languages of this country", stated the Deputy Minister.

The 16th October 2015 marked the International Dictionary Day and PanSALB is pleased to announce that between this day and the middle of December 2015 about thirteen new or revised editions of indigenous language monolingual, and English – indigenous language bilingual dictionaries will be published. A further two dictionaries will be available early in 2016.

The nine indigenous language Units have recently agreed to an overarching structure – The South African National Lexicography Units – in order to:

1). Launch and maintain an awareness creation programme to inform the public and all government departments and agencies, including schools and tertiary education institutions, of the Units, their work, achievements and our new publication development plans.

2). Persuade the above agencies to implement and use our dictionaries, and to involve them – in particular Government's other indigenous language support and development structures, tertiary institutions, National and Provincial Departments of Education – in revisions of existing dictionaries and the identification of new projects which will elevate the status and increase the use of our languages.

3). Remind Government agencies of their Constitutional obligation to our indigenous languages and persuade the private sector to play an active role in this regard.

4). Co-ordination of the Units book development activities ensuring that no indigenous language, on the basis of having fewer speakers, is disadvantaged over any other language

While the Units are national entities, they are based in the province or provincial district in which their language predominates, but the result of their work benefits all speakers and learners of the language no matter where they reside.

They are located as follows:

Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Sesotho sa Leboa – Limpopo; Siswati – Mpumalanga; isiNdebele – Gauteng; isiZulu – Kwa Zulu Natal; isiXhosa and English – Eastern Cape; Sesotho – Free State; Setswana – North West and Afrikaans – Western Cape.

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