

# ZIMBABWE REPORT (1<sup>ST</sup>) ON COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES (IDIL 2022-2032)

By

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## **1. Preamble**

Professor Wiseman Magwa was appointed to become Zimbabwe's focal person on the Global Task Force for Indigenous Languages on 20 March 2024. Thereafter, he attended three (3) UNESCO meetings held virtually on 25/03/24; 27/03/24 and 28/03/24 respectively. This report aims to provide a summary of the language activities and events carried out in the country in commemoration of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) and concludes with a set of recommendations for immediate action by the Government through the Ministry of Sports, Arts and Recreation.

## **2. Why an International Decade of Indigenous Languages?**

2.1 On 18 December 2019, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in its Resolution 74/135 on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples proclaimed the period 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) and invited UNESCO to serve as the United Nations lead agency for this International Decade. UNESCO was invited in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and other United Nations system entities.

- 2.2 The justification for setting aside a decade to deal with indigenous languages is based on the fact that language plays a crucial role for people and the planet. People's ability and freedom to use their chosen language is essential for human dignity, peaceful co-existence, reciprocal action and for the general well-being and sustainable development of society at large. It is through languages that people embed their worldviews, memory and traditional knowledge. Again it is through language that people construct their future. The other reason for setting aside an international decade of indigenous languages is that many languages are today in danger of falling into disuse.
- 2.3 The gradual disappearance of languages, particularly indigenous ones is connected to the vulnerable situation of their users (speakers and signers). The risk now is that parents and elders can no longer transmit indigenous languages to their children and that indigenous languages fall out of daily use. There is therefore an urgent need to protect, revitalize and promote indigenous languages around the world. This means appreciating their wider and deeper role in peacebuilding, good governance, the protection of the environment and the safeguarding of culture in all its forms.
- 2.4 In light of all this collaboration and continuity in policy, resource allocation, multilateral and multi-stakeholder dialogues and meaningful participation by indigenous peoples, are essential for promoting, protecting and strengthening indigenous languages and empowering their users. This global approach offers scope for building on the existing range of international regional, national and local policy and regulatory frameworks. The International Decade presents a unique framework for convening a wide range of stakeholders collectively to align their efforts, accelerate development plans, make strategic investments, set research and legislative agendas and launch concrete initiatives around common goals. In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages aims to leave no one behind and no one outside. The IDIL 2022-2034 provides a new international cooperation framework for coordinated action involving the commitment of all stakeholders. The IDIL is everyone's decade hence equality, inclusion and gender sensitivity are essential for the successful implementation of global and national action plans.



*Launching the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in Paris, France*

### **3. The Global Action Plan**

- 3.1 To prepare the Global Action Plan, UNESCO in collaboration with UNDESA and other United Nations system entities established a Global Task Force for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in March 2021 to guide the preparation, planning, implementation and monitoring of progress towards the attainment of the objectives of the Global Action Plan (GAP). The Global Task Force consists of nineteen (19) representatives from UNESCO Member States, Indigenous People’s Organizations, designated members of the United Nations, indigenous mechanisms, staff from UNESCO, UNDESA and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
- 3.2 A draft Global Action Plan was developed by members of the Global Task Force in September 2021 and online public peer review consultations were launched in October 2021 to provide an opportunity for all interested stakeholders to contribute to the finalization of the Global Action Plan. The Global Action Plan is therefore a result of extensive deliberations among all concerned stakeholders. The Plan sets the direction for joint action and has been developed to serve as a guiding framework for all stakeholders to prepare regional, national, local or institutional plans. The Global Action Plan calls for a coherent approach and for joint collaborative action by all stakeholders to achieve maximal positive impact and social change to indigenous languages and those who speak and sign them.



*Global Taskforce Members in Paris, France*

- 3.3 The Global Action Plan set a Vision for the International Decade namely; “We see a world in which indigenous peoples will entrust their languages to future generations creating a better society for everyone”. The Plan proposes a user-centric approach towards the usage, preservation, revitalization and promotion of indigenous languages. It places a central focus on indigenous peoples and language users.
- 3.4 The Global Action Plan presents ten (10) interlinked outputs which describe the value of preserving, revitalizing and promoting indigenous languages. Below is a list of the Global Action Plan outputs:
- (i) Inclusive, equitable, intercultural, quality education and life learning environments and opportunities in indigenous languages provided in formal, non-formal and informal educational settings.
  - (ii) Enhanced capacities among indigenous peoples for applying their languages and knowledge to the eradication of hunger and maintaining the integrity of indigenous food systems.
  - (iii) Favourable conditions to be established for digital empowerment, freedom of expression, media development, and access to information and language technology, alongside the artistic creation of indigenous languages.

- (iv) Appropriate indigenous language frameworks are designed to offer better health provision, recognizing traditional systems of medicine as well as promoting social cohesion and delivering humanitarian responses, especially during health crises, times of conflict and natural disasters.
- (v) Access to justice and availability of public services are guaranteed to indigenous language speakers and signers.
- (vi) Indigenous languages are sustained as vehicles of living heritage and biodiversity whilst participation in and access to all forms of culture are enhanced for Indigenous people.
- (vii) An enabling environment is created for indigenous languages, thereby contributing to biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, ecosystem management, land restoration, improving the marine and coastal environment, reducing natural hazards, preventing pollution and managing water resources.
- (viii) Economic growth is strengthened by enhanced decent job opportunities for indigenous peoples and language users.
- (ix) Gender equality and women's empowerment are achieved through the preservation, revitalization and promotion of indigenous languages.
- (x) Public and private partnerships are firmly established to place on the global agenda a long-term commitment to the preservation, revitalization and promotion of indigenous languages.

Specific activities outlined in the Global Action Plan include among others the following:

- ✓ Development of education policies, plans, and programmes to support mother-tongue-based and multilingual education.
- ✓ Foster curriculum development which is comprehensive, gender-responsive, human rights-based, inclusive, linguistically diverse, culturally sensitive and respectful of indigenous knowledge and culture, as well as stimulating intellectual dialogue and participation.
- ✓ Development of professional standards and skills among teachers, educators and language specialists (such as translators) through initial in-service training at all levels of education.

- ✓ Raising awareness on the importance of intergenerational transmission of food systems through indigenous languages, encouraging co-creation of knowledge bases between indigenous and non-indigenous systems.
- ✓ Development of appropriate policy and conduct of research on the linkages between indigenous languages and specialized knowledge of food systems, agro-biodiversity, wild foodstuffs and nutrition, together with reinforcement of international cooperation and strategic partnerships.
- ✓ Production and dissemination of indigenous language tools and resources including those produced in digital formats.
- ✓ Involving indigenous peoples themselves in the standardisation activities, content development and capacity building through special events, prizes and award ceremonies.
- ✓ Exchange of traditional knowledge and the building of repositories of manuals, books and brochures.
- ✓ Raising awareness among policy and decision-makers and developing comprehensive policies which recognize ancestral and traditional knowledge.
- ✓ Production and dissemination of multilingual and culturally appropriate content particularly materials created by indigenous peoples in their languages.
- ✓ Development of robust data tools to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples and specifically help them to access public services in indigenous languages including the extension of the use of indigenous names and words to official signage focusing on place name signs in areas traditionally inhabited by indigenous peoples.
- ✓ Promote the functional usage of indigenous languages within legal services and public spaces generally by training and upskilling relevant staff in national and local governments.
- ✓ Creation of viable income-generating employment opportunities in indigenous languages particularly those related to heritage management.
- ✓ Offer adequate and decent empowerment opportunities for indigenous language users including women and persons with disabilities, artists, translators and interpreters, language technology specialists and other media professionals.
- ✓ Awareness raising fostering participation, inclusion and social dialogue among employers and employees around the importance of indigenous linguistic competencies as valuable workplace skills contributing to a decent working environment.

- ✓ Development of large-scale awareness campaigns, establishment of safe public spaces for dialogue, design of appropriate educational materials and content in indigenous languages to tackle socio-cultural, economic, environmental, legal and political challenges confronted by indigenous women and girls.
- ✓ Capacity building of indigenous organizations and institutions to ensure justice, information and counselling are accessible in indigenous languages.
- ✓ Mobilization of financial resources for the implementation of the Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages through the establishment of a multi-donor trust fund to support particular actions taken by indigenous peoples' institutions and organizations.
- ✓ Organize a global advocacy campaign stimulating international cooperation and policy dialogues through high-level events.

The Global Action Plan will incorporate a series of monitoring mechanisms to allow rapid identification of progress and response to change. A robust monitoring and reporting framework will feed information into a structured process of regular reviews to underpin flexible management of the IDIL and to provide stakeholders with information on the benefits generated by the International Decade and thus inspire sustainable action and engagement. It is expected that the methodology for monitoring the progress made towards the achievement of outcomes and outputs will support better planning, decision-making and exchange of information and knowledge. It is also presumed that the monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework will make the whole Decade's process transparent, inclusive and participatory, will ensure accountability of all partners around their involvement and will provide valuable information to donors, the media, target groups and citizens overall. Finally, monitoring, evaluation and reporting will contribute to gathering information as a pre-requisite for informed policy planning and decision-making.

#### **4. Regional Action Plans**

Regional Action Plans will be developed by a range of regional stakeholders to underpin the implementation of the Global Action Plan. The desired response would be regional plans incorporating the results of joint consultations alongside a commitment to collaborate at the regional level based on the needs and priorities identified in that region. A regional action plan could include plans developed by intergovernmental organisations from countries in the same region and following common policies or cross-border

indigenous people's institutions and organisations that have a regional mandate.

## **5. National Action Plans**

National Action Plans are developed by national governmental organisations in collaboration with indigenous peoples' institutions and organisations along with various public and research bodies, together with other public and private partners working at the national and local levels. The National Action Plans will outline an individual government's approach and course of action for localizing the Global Action Plan. It is also expected that the National Action Plans will guide government agencies and competent bodies to develop their institutional plans. Such national plans will address local linguistic specificities, determine national priorities, offer relevant activities, establish governing structures and encourage the formation of National Committees. The national committees would be composed of a wide range of stakeholders to share in responsibility, ensure coordination, monitoring and reporting processes at the national level as well as to allocate the necessary human, financial and institutional resources.

## **6. Institutional Action Plans**

Institutional Action Plans are designed by public and private bodies, particularly indigenous people's institutions and organisations which are geared up to mainstream and implement specific actions across their work domain. (i.e. Higher Education and Research Institutions).

## **7. The Global Task Force**

7.1 The Global Task Force (GTF) was established as an international governance mechanism to ensure equitable participation of all stakeholders in the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) and to provide advice and guidance on the preparation, planning, implementation and monitoring progress towards attainment of the objectives of the Global Action Plan. The work of the GTF is based on the principles of equality, diversity, inclusion and participation. Since the International Decade of Indigenous Languages will require work over a ten (10) year period, a rotation system among the members responsible for the international governance mechanism has been established and working modalities agreed upon. Full effective participation by indigenous peoples through their institutional

representatives ensures a broad representation of the world's indigenous peoples. The highest ethical standards with zero tolerance for harassment are expected of all members of the Global Task Force.



7.2 The Global Task Force is made up of the following three (3) main entities or categories:

- Steering Committee including Advisors
- Ad-hoc groups
- Multi-stakeholder consultative meeting.

The appointment of members to the Steering Committee, Advisors to the Steering Committee and members to the Ad-hoc groups of the GTF varies according to the type of membership. The list of members of the Global Task Force is updated annually and the terms of reference can be amended on a consensus or majority basis.

7.3 The role of the Steering Committee is to guide the overall implementation of the Global Action Plan. The Steering Committee meetings are attended by members of the Steering Committee, the Advisors and Observers as well as the UN-system entities. The Committee is made up of nineteen (19) representatives from;

- UNESCO Member States (6 members)

- Representatives of Indigenous Peoples' Institutions and Organisations (7 members)
- Representatives of UN Indigenous Mechanisms (3 members)
- UN-system entities (3 members)

NB: UNESCO serves as the Secretariat of the Global Task Force and organizes meetings aligned to the key milestones of the IDIL 2022 to 2032 work plans.

The Global Task Force established 4 Ad-hoc groups to provide advice on specific aspects of the implementation of the Global Action Plan. Depending on the subject matter, the Ad-hoc groups shall consist of a group of individual experts who represent their governments, Indigenous Peoples institutions and organisations, academic, civil society and public and private organisations and other stakeholders (both in personal and institutional capacity). The Ad-hoc groups are listed as follows:

Ad-hoc Group 1: Provision of education and domains for indigenous languages, which will focus on education systems, policies and ensuring inclusive and equitable education.

Ad-hoc Group 2: Indigenous language transmission and resilience building, which will focus on the empowerment of all generations in knowledge transmission through language.

Ad-hoc Group 3: Recognition, status and implementation of policy for the indigenous languages, which will map the recognition and status of indigenous languages in language policies and analyse the implementation of those policies.

Ad-hoc Group 4: Digital equality and domains, which will aim to bring down the barriers indigenous languages face in the digital domain.

Virtual meetings using remote online communication tools are the major working modality. English, French, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish are currently the working languages of the Global Task Force. So far the GTF has held twelve (12 ) meetings from 2021 to date but Zimbabwe for some strange reasons did not attend most of the meetings and was for the first time represented by a language expert at

the 12<sup>th</sup> GTF meeting held on 28 March 2024 after the appointment of Professor W. Magwa as the country representative on the Global Task Force. Highlights of the 12<sup>th</sup> Global Meeting are as shown below.

- Nominations of Member States and Indigenous Peoples Organisations were received but the Africa Region is yet to submit names of the representatives from the region.
- Ad-hoc groups in the Global Task Force were established as follows as shown above.

NB: Zimbabwe was nominated as a member in Groups 1 and 3 respectively and Professor W. Magwa will be representing the country in these two ad-hoc committees.

- Terms of reference for the Ad-hoc Committees were presented and adopted by members in the meeting.
- Guidance Note on the development of National Action Plans was presented and adopted.
- Other reports presented for noting were as follows:
  - ✓ International Mother Language Day 2024 Celebrations
  - ✓ World Philosophy Day
  - ✓ Second Meeting of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in Brazil
  - ✓ World Day for Cultural Diversity
  - ✓ UNIPFII event on the digital divide of Indigenous languages
  - ✓ Overview of EMRIP actions
  - ✓ UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education 2004

The UNESCO Secretariat will continue to prepare the agenda, minutes and other documents for future meetings of the Global Task Force.

## **8. International Decade Language Activities and Events in Zimbabwe**

This section of the report is a summary of language and cultural activities that took place from 2021 when the International Decade was launched in Paris, France up to the present day in 2024. These activities were organized mainly by the Ministry of Sport, Arts and Recreation in collaboration with the

National Arts Council of Zimbabwe. Below is a list of the activities and events.

### **8.1 *Setting Up the National Languages Advisory Committee***

Zimbabwe just like other nations of the world geared itself up to commemorate the International Decade of Indigenous Languages by setting up a National Languages Advisory Committee (NALAC) in July 2021. NALAC was established to promote and safeguard the country's indigenous languages as enshrined in the Constitutional Amendment (2013). The UN, UNESCO and other organisations including the African Union (AU) acclaim language and correctly so as a vehicle for a people's culture and identity.

The National Language Advisory Committee is responsible for the promotion, development and safeguarding of the local languages of Zimbabwe as they are a critical identity marker and natural preservers of our people's rich cultural and diverse heritage. NALAC was established to support the efforts of language communities to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen indigenous languages. It is also a committee that helps to advance the achievement of the objectives of the Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The other justification for setting up the National Languages Advisory Committee is to plan initiatives and activities for restoring and maintaining local languages and also to support local languages teaching and learning. The Committee is made up of 15 members who were appointed by the Minister responsible for Arts and Culture. Members were chosen for their knowledge and understanding of local languages and their understanding of the language situation in Zimbabwe. Heads of Government Departments and Parastatals that are related to Arts, Culture and Heritage attend NALAC meetings as ex-officio members.

## 8.2 *Establishment of the National Language Institute*



The National Languages Institute based at the Midlands State University in Gweru is a national language centre born out of the need to make a specific contribution to the use and development of research in indigenous languages, hence a strong research agenda for the Institute. The Institute was commissioned as a national language centre in November 2021 by His Excellence, President Dr E. D. Mnangagwa. The establishment of the Language Institute is in tandem with IDIL (2022-232) objectives which seek to promote the use of indigenous languages as tools for development. Driven by Zimbabwe's Second Republic agenda to attain middle-class income status by 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1, the language centre is a timely response to the opportunities in matters of language with a particular focus on the provision of language consultancy, advocacy, promotion, and development.

The Language Institute has the potential to grow into a world-class centre of excellence in language research, language policy and planning and other language consultancy services such as developing

dictionaries (lexicography), developing orthographies for marginalized indigenous languages, basic training in specialized language services, language policy development, document proofreading, thesis and dissertation editing and translation services. Highly qualified native speakers of different languages spoken in the country work at the Institute as Language Research Professors, Language Research fellows, and Language Research Assistants hence the Institute hopes to transform itself into a reputable national brand that boasts of highly motivated language experts with commendable work ethics.



*Commissioning of the Language Institute by the President of Zimbabwe, His Excellency Dr. E. D. Mnangagwa*

### **8.3 The Victoria Falls National Languages Conference/Indaba**

The then Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation organized a national conference to launch the International Decade of Indigenous Languages on 14-16 June 2022 at the Elephant Hills Hotel in Victoria Falls. The Conference was also meant to give effect to the language provisions in the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act (No. 20) hence it sought to promote, preserve and develop all the officially recognized languages of Zimbabwe. It was an all-inclusive conference

that had an aim to generate national consensus and a roadmap for the development of the National Languages Policy and a National Languages Bill. The Conference/Indaba was in pursuit of the goal of aligning Zimbabwe's language resources to National Vision 2030 and International Decade 2022-2032.

The President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, His Excellency, Dr E. D. Mnangagwa was the Guest of Honour at the historic National Languages Conference. Other notable delegates at the event were the Vice President, Honourable Retired General Dr C. G. D. N. Chiwenga, the Minister of Defence and War Veterans Affairs and Chairman of the ruling ZANU (PF) party, Honourable O. C. Z. Muchinguri-Kashiri, the Minister of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation, Honourable Dr K. Coventry, Ministers of Provincial Affairs and Devolution, Deputy Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Vice Chancellors of Universities, Principals of Polytechnics and Teachers Colleges, Chairpersons of Commissions, Traditional leaders, Zimbabwe National Commission for UNESCO, Language and Culture experts, Language Associations Representatives, Heads of Parastatals, the Clergy, Traditional Healers representatives, Civic Society Organisations representatives, Members of Parliament and Captains of Cultural and Creative Industries.



*Guest of Honour President E. D. Mnangagwa at the Language Indaba*

The Conference was indeed a huge milestone in the country since it marked a deepened commitment by the Government to the International Decade of Indigenous Languages goals of promoting the use and development of indigenous languages. The three (3) day Conference (14-16 June 2022) sought to strengthen all languages that are spoken in Zimbabwe as vehicles of intergenerational transmission of living heritage or intangible cultural heritage of all mother-tongue speakers. In holding the National Languages Indaba, the nation advanced the achievement of the objectives of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Sustainable Development Goals, the 1986 Organisation of African Unity, Language Plan for Africa, African Union's Agenda 2063, 'The Africa we want', the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy 1 (2021-2025). The Conference/Indaba was therefore a step in harnessing national languages into an all-inclusive development and constitutional democracy anchored on the national ethos of inclusive citizenship, dignity, equality and the promotion of basic freedoms and fundamental human rights entitlements. Conference outcomes were namely;

- (i) National Languages Policy Draft Framework
- (ii) National Languages Bill Draft Framework
- (iii) National Languages Fund Draft Framework

The above-mentioned are essential frameworks for the development of indigenous languages and increasing their functional space in high-function domains. The National Languages Indaba held in Victoria Falls demonstrated and affirmed indigenous languages as vital cogs and indispensable heritage for inclusive access to basic services across all sectors of society to ensure increased production and productivity.

#### ***8.4 National Commemoration of the African Languages Week***

The occasion of the launch of commemorations for the **African Languages Week** (22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023) was held at the Midlands State University under the auspices of the then Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation as a precursor to the National Culture Month Celebrations that were set to be launched by His Excellency, President Dr E. D. Mnangagwa on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2023 in Binga, Matabeleland North

Province of Zimbabwe. The Guest of Honour at the commemorations held at the Midlands State University was the Speaker of Parliament, Honourable Advocate J. F. N. Mudenda. Other notable delegates at this national event were:

- The Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution for Midlands, Honourable L. Mavima
- The Minister of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation, Honourable K. Coventry
- The Deputy Minister of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation, Honourable T. Machakaire
- Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation, Dr T. Chitepo
- Vice Chancellors of Universities
- Principals of Teachers Colleges
- Representatives of Indigenous Languages Associations
- Language and Cultural experts
- Traditional Leaders and
- Civic Organisations representatives

The theme for the 2023 African Languages Week commemorations was, **“African Languages for Sustainable Food Security, Cultural and Socio-Economic Development for the Africa We Want”**. The event evoked the need for the renaissance of African languages spurred by several conferences and declarations over the years as undersigned by UNESCO and the African Union. Objectives of the African Languages week were:

- (i) To celebrate and reflect on the values of Zimbabwe’s indigenous languages during the week.
- (ii) To increase awareness and appreciation of African languages by all citizens in the country.

The Guest of Honour emphatically stated that many conferences and declarations on the African continent attest to the urgent need for African languages to assert their sovereign linguistic application in both the private and public sectors. He further said that there is an inextricable link between our African languages and sustainable food

security, cultural and socio-economic development for the Africa we want. It is therefore axiomatic that African languages be employed in advancing new technologies, mechanization and appropriate farming practices which enhance production and productivity to achieve food security in Africa.

In conclusion, the Speaker urged Zimbabweans to preserve indigenous languages, cultures and heritage in a manner that will promote sustainable food security, cultural and socio-economic development in Africa. The African Languages Week was officially launched paving the way for various commemorative activities in all the ten (10) provinces of Zimbabwe.



*Commemoration of the African Languages Week at the Midlands State University*

## **8.5 Language Policy Development Activities**

### **8.5.1 National Language Policy**

Zimbabwe presently does not have a National Languages Policy which should be the blue print or reference point in all matters pertaining to languages. As was the case with the rest of Africa, colonization led to

the neglect and marginalization of African languages in the then Rhodesia. English was made the *de facto* official language and was used in all high profile spheres such as in education, business, the judiciary, health, politics and in many other sectors to the detriment of local African languages which remained underdeveloped as they were relegated for use only at home and other informal spaces.

Post-independence Zimbabwe carried on with the language policy of the former colonisers where English continued to be the official language. ChiShona and IsiNdebele continued serving as the marginal or peripheral roles with reference to them being made as national languages. Amendment of the Constitution of Zimbabwe in 2013 raised the status of African languages to official status when they were recognised as such. Of supreme importance is the fact that the Amendment of the Constitution in 2013 obligates the State to promote and advance the use of local languages in Zimbabwe including Sign Language.

The process of developing a National Language Policy for Zimbabwe kicked off at the National Language Indaba held in Victoria Falls from 14-16 June 2022 at the Elephant Hills Hotel. This was followed up by another consultative workshop held in Harare at Pandhari Hotel on 27 March 2023 where a draft National Language Policy was developed. The National Language Policy of Zimbabwe is embedded within the following principles which must guide its interpretation and application.

- Recognition of the supremacy of the Constitution
- Promotion of linguistic accessibility of all institutions and agencies of Government at every level
- Respect for the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in Zimbabwe
- Entrenchment of multilingual service provision in all institutions and agencies of Government at every level
- Equitable treatment and use of all officially recognised languages and forms of communication suitable for persons with disabilities

- Acknowledgement of language rights as an inalienable human rights issue

The National Language Policy takes cognizance of the constitutional provisions on multilingualism and is in concert with the Government’s goals for socio-economic development. The policy applies to all institutions and agencies of Government at all levels. All Government and private structures are bound by this policy. Furthermore, The Zimbabwean Government will encourage and support private enterprises to develop and implement their own language policies in accordance with the guidelines of the National Language Policy. The National Language Policy was validated by representatives from Indigenous Languages Associations and language experts from institutions of Higher Education (i.e. Universities and colleges) at a workshop held in Harare, Pandhari Hotel on 14 May 2024.



*Language Policy Validation Workshop at Pandhari Hotel, Harare*

A final draft was produced and now awaits official launch and commissioning by the Minister of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture at a date to be advised. Below are pictures of the Validation Workshop in Harare.

### ***8.5.2 Developing the Language Policy for the Parliament of Zimbabwe***



*Inside the National Assembly Parliament Building*

The Parliament of Zimbabwe organized a workshop on 19-24 January 2023 at the Rainbow Hotel in Bulawayo to draft a language policy for the National Assembly.



### *Parliament Language Policy Workshop in Bulawayo*

Parliament deems it imperative that it develops and adopts an inclusive language policy that recognizes Zimbabwe as a multicultural nation. For a very long time in the National Assembly, the indigenous languages of Zimbabwe have not enjoyed the prominence that English has had as the sole language of record. In the spirit of inclusivity, openness and accessibility, the Parliament of Zimbabwe has made it its prerogative to entrench greater participatory democracy, national unity and patriotism through the use of local languages by Parliamentarians and ancillary staff in parliament processes. The language policy for the Parliament of Zimbabwe aims to deepen national pride and participatory democracy through entrenching language and cultural rights that would in turn enhance public access to and involvement in Parliament and access to information by all citizens.

All officially recognised languages will be used in all Parliamentary business and the Speaker of the National Assembly shall make the necessary arrangements for interpretation into all officially recognised languages according to the Members' and other participants' declared language preference. Interpretation services will be made available in the chambers and galleries for members of the House, Committee, members of the public, visitors and the media. English or any other

officially recognised language that may be prescribed as a language of record shall be the business language and medium of communication for record keeping and administration in Parliament. Parliament should make available translated versions of records in the registered language preferences of the stakeholders. The language policy for the Parliament of Zimbabwe was effected on 02 January 2024.

## ***8.6 International Mother Tongue Day Commemorations***

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), set 21<sup>st</sup> February of every year as a day for marking mother language day. Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Sports, Arts and Recreation and the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe realized that it would be critical to demonstrate that language is a powerful vehicle and carrier of culture and identity of a people as acclaimed by SADC, AU, UN and UNESCO and other organisations. In seeking to advance local African languages, the Ministry of Sports, Arts and Recreation and related agencies, that is the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe (NACZ) and the National Gallery of Zimbabwe (NGZ), working closely with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science, Innovation and Technology, Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Health and Child Care, Ministry of Environment, Tourism, Climate and Hospitality Industries and the Ministry of Lands, *Agriculture*, Fisheries, Water and Rural Settlement partnered in the implementation of language-related projects.

### ***8.6.1 International Mother Language Day Commemorations in Harare***

Zimbabwe started celebrating the **International Mother Language Day** way before the launch of the International Decade of Indigenous

Languages. The day is now an annual event commemorated every February of each year. On 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024, Zimbabwe joined the rest of the world in celebrating *International Mother Language Day*. The day was proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1999 and was embraced by the UN General Assembly in its Resolution A/RES/56/262 of 2002. This year's event was commemorated under the theme, "Multilingual education is the pillar of intergenerational learning". To mark the day, the Midlands State University National Language Institute (MSUNLI) and UNESCO jointly hosted the 2024 National Languages Indaba in Harare. The celebrations came at a time when many languages were dying due to technological advancements and an increasingly globalized village. The MSUNLI-UNESCO organized Indaba/Dare was aimed at developing cultural appreciation based on Zimbabwe's linguistic diversity. The Indaba/Dare offered a platform for dialoguing, exploring and collaboration in celebrating the beauty of mother tongues. Stakeholders converged to tap into each other's expertise to find ways to develop, empower, digitize and intellectualize these tongues for the greater good. Participants also sought to set up specialized teams for the development of orthography, lexicography and language data sets (i.e. spell checkers) in addition to other applications for digital animation of heritage, culture and indigenous games.

Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, Permanent secretary, Professor F. Tagwira who was the Guest of Honour at the Indaba stressed the need for the preservation of indigenous languages as provided for by the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

"It is an indisputable fact that the most defining feature of humanity is language. Besides its role of positioning humanity above all other creatures, language has a critical role in the preservation of idiosyncratic cultural knowledge, history and geography", said Professor Tagwira. Presenters and panelists at this national language event were drawn from:

- Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development

- UNESCO
- Parliament of Zimbabwe
- National Languages Advisory Committee
- Ministry of Sport, Arts and Recreation
- Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
- Indigenous Languages Associations
- Traditional Leaders

The event ended with participants agreeing that Zimbabwe's Constitution, notably Section 6 profoundly acknowledges and safeguards linguistic diversity and rights. It highlights the importance of preserving all languages. This recognition fosters inclusivity, national unity and social cohesion among Zimbabwe's diverse communities. Linguistic recognition also preserves traditional knowledge and cultural practices, enriching Zimbabwe's cultural heritage. Overall, the Constitution's stance on linguistic diversity promotes social harmony, equitable development and cultural enrichment within the nation. Languages, participants concurred, are warehouses of cultural and indigenous intellect and a means of expressing oneself, thought processes and ingenuities. Without language, a community loses its identity.

The National Languages Indaba joint event by UNESCO and MSUNLI was a big positive step towards the attainment of the objectives of the International Decade. Zimbabwe, by commemorating this international day, has shown a solid commitment to join the rest of the world in commemorating the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

The year 2024 also witnessed the hosting of mother language commemorations by the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe in Masvingo Province, Matabeleland South and Mashonaland West under the UN Observances.

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*International Mother Tongue Day Celebrations in Harare*

## 8.6.2 Masvingo Province Mother Tongue Commemorations

Activities for the day ranged from a procession by drum majorettes participating groups, music, poetry, contemporary dance, exhibition of literary works, topic presentations in indigenous language and encouraging communication in any language.

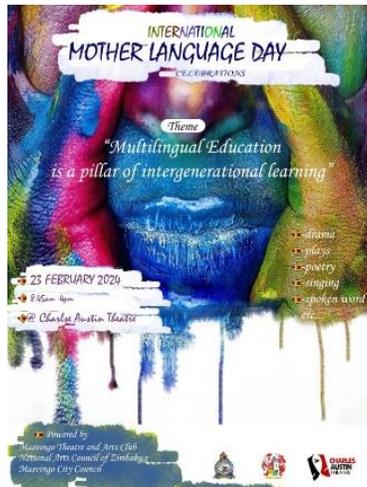


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

Figure 1: Event Poster

Figure 2: Singing National Anthem in Sign Language, Venda, Shangaani, and Ndebele

Figure 3: Procession

Figure 2: Guest speaker – Chairperson; Languages Media and Communication Studies – Robert Mugabe school of Heritage and Education

Figure 5: Poet Performer Mamboguramatunhu

Figure 6: Participants in the Hall

### **8.6.3 Matabeleland South Province Mother Tongue Commemorations**

In February 2024 the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe in partnership with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education commemorated the International Mother Languages Day at the belated date 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2024 which was hosted at Gwanda Government Secondary School.

The guest of honour was Mr Sydney Sibanda the District Schools Inspector Gwanda district. Mr P Vela the Provincial manager presented the remarks giving a detailed

background of commemorating the International Mother Languages Day as well as the role the NACZ plays in promoting and championing Arts Development in the province and the nation as a whole.

Also, Mr N Sibanda the Provincial programmes officer gave a presentation on the opportunities and challenges `on using Technology for multilingual teaching and learning. The theme for the International Mother Languages Day was: Using Technology for Multilingual Learning: Challenges and Opportunities.



#### ***8.6.4 Mashonaland West Province Commemorations***

A belated commemoration of Mother Language Day was held in Lion's Den in early March 2024 as a community commemoration with local children in the rural community sharing the importance of languages and how to embrace them. The event was merged with World Poetry Commemoration, theatre and puppetry day for Children commemoration. Mashonaland West commemorated the UN Observances on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2024 in Chegutu. Storybook readings and the launching of new books were done by the Association of Essential Book Writers. Our mother language was expressed through live traditional performances, choral music and spoken word, mainly poetry and literature reading of indigenous books.

## Mashonaland West Event in Pictures



### 8.7 Culture Month Commemorations May 2024

Zimbabwe hosted the Culture Month 2024 at a time when the nation is at an accelerated drive in implementing the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and fast pacing towards Vision 2030 aimed at building Zimbabwe. The giant step being taken by the Creative and Cultural industries is that of putting all our energies together in implementing cultural programmes that facilitate economic growth by a people who are resilient, hardworking and patriotic. Over the years, Culture Month has been known for gathering many people around the event in all provinces. This year 2024 is no exception. During the Culture month, the Ministry of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture held Provincial Launches in all the ten (10) administrative provinces. The Grand National Culture Month event to draw down curtains on

commemorations was held on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024 by Manicaland Province in Chipinge District under Chief Garahwa of Chisumbanje at Marega Primary School.

The Guest of Honour at the National Commemoration event was the Vice President, Honourable (Rtd) Colonel K. C. Mohadi.



*The Guest of Honour Officiating at the National Event*

The theme for the 2024 Culture Month Commemorations was, “*Our Culture, Building Zimbabwe Brick by Brick*”. The theme is in line with Vision 2030 and it is a commitment by the Creative and Culture Industries sector of Zimbabwe in the implementation and realization of the National Development Strategy 1 objectives. The 2024 Culture Month Celebrations were run both physically and virtually. The digital flow of the Cultural and Creative services is fast embracing new technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the ever-present digital environment.

Addressing thousands of people at the National Culture Month commemorations held at Marega Primary School the Vice President, Kembo Mohadi stressed that Zimbabweans should respect and honour local languages, indigenous cuisines, the national dress and indigenous folklores. The Culture Month was punctuated by provincial launches headed by Ministers of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution.



*Culture Month Celebrations in Matabeleland South Province*



*Culture Month Celebrations in Harare Province*

Before addressing the bumper crowd, the Vice President toured exhibits mounted by organisations and individuals showcasing various cultural wares, artefacts and traditional foods. The Minister of Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture, Dr Kirsty Coventry who was also a guest at the function emphasized that the Zimbabwean nation celebrated not only the richness of local culture but also the essential role of cultural dialogue in achieving peace and sustainable development. Other notable guests at the event were the Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution for Manicaland Province, Advocate M. Mugadza, Deputy Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, and Traditional Leaders. The thousands of people who attended the event had a memorable day as renowned artists and traditional groups took turns to entertain them.

The National Culture Month Commemorations chronicled Zimbabwe’s success stories in cultural renaissance, national development and the impact of the arts and culture on economic development, the fight against drug and substance abuse, including other societal ills. The Commemorations were held in collaboration agencies such as the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe (NACZ), the National Gallery of Zimbabwe (NGZ), plus all Ministries Development Agencies (MDAs), Educational Institutions, Traditional Leadership, the Corporate World, Development Partners, Civic Society Organisations (CSOs).

The 2024 Culture Month Commemorations Programme was as follows:

WEEK	PERIOD	WEEKLY THEME	ACTIVITIES
1	May 01 - 06	<i>Promotion of all Indigenous languages</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official Start of Culture Month – 01 May</li> <li>• Communities encouraged to speak and valourise their indigenous languages.</li> <li>• The workplace to use indigenous languages,</li> <li>• Challenge oneself to learn one or two indigenous languages other than your own.</li> <li>• Conduct business and meetings in any of Zimbabwe’s local languages.</li> </ul>
2	May 07 - 13	<i>Promotion of the farming of traditional indigenous foods and</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussions on the promotion of farming small grains and traditional foods</li> </ul>

		<i>up-scaling consumption of Indigenous foods</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hotels and Restaurants are called upon to serve traditional cuisines.</li> <li>Dining halls in educational institutions and workplaces encouraged to prepare African traditional dishes/cuisine</li> <li>Discussions around culture as business</li> </ul>
3	May 14 - 20	<i>National Dress and African Attire showcase</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everyone in industry, business, corporates, schools, all learning centers and works places to dress in African attire and /or National Dress fabric couture outfits.</li> <li>On <b>18 and 19 May</b> dressing to be exclusively on any of the <b>National Fabric colours</b></li> <li>Discussions on radio/television/social gatherings to centre on identity and national pride</li> </ul>
4	May 21 - 27	<i>Celebrating African Languages, and Creative Expressions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The week celebrates the participation of communities' discussion on matters of cultural heritage, ubuntu, dressing and grooming, drugs, and general societal moral uprightness on Community Radio Stations, National Radio and television broadcast using Indigenous language on themed discussions and presentations around culture.</li> <li>Creative expressions through music, song and dance, theatre and film, fashion and design, poetry and spoken word, folklore, visual art exhibitions, Art dialogues.</li> <li>Provincial Launches commemorations will be running throughout Zimbabwe.</li> </ul>
5	May 28 - 31	<i>Promotion of Cultural Dialogue at all levels</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There will be the conducting of Community Cultural Dialogues involving in school and out of school pupils and youth, the elderly men/women, traditional leaders and religious leaders on <b>Nhanga/Gota/Ixhiba</b> Cultural dialogues</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live Culture Dialogue and debates on Radio and television</li> <li>• Existing Talk Show programmes will host topics that promote Culture Dialogues.</li> </ul>
	<b>31 MAY 2024</b>	<b>National Culture Month Commemorations' Official Closing Ceremony at Marega School Chief Garahwa Village, Chisumbanje in Chipinge, Manicaland</b>	<b>Guest of Honour: Vice President Hon. Colonel (Rtd) K.C.D. Mohadi</b>



Director of Ceremonies:  
Secretary for Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture Mr. N. Moyo

TIME	ACTIVITY	FACILITATOR
08:00hrs	Entertainment	[Deejay, Traditional Groups]
09:00hrs	Arrival of invited Guests and Tour of Exhibition Stands	
09:30hrs	Arrival of Guest of Honour The Vice President of Zimbabwe Hon. K. C. D. Mohadi	Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution for Manicaland Province Hon. Adv. M. Mugadza
09:40hrs	Tour of Exhibition Stands by Guest of Honour	Minister of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture - Hon. Dr. K. Coventry Director of Ceremonies
10:10hrs	National Anthem	
10:15hrs	Prayer	
10:20hrs	Hlonbe kuna Mamba Garahwa	Muzukuru wa Mamba
10:25hrs	Entertainment	
10:40hrs	Introductions and Remarks	Director of Ceremonies
10:55hrs	Entertainment	Director of Ceremonies
11:10hrs	Welcome remarks by the Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution for Manicaland Province - Adv. M. Mugadza	Director of Ceremonies
11:20hrs	Entertainment	
11:35hrs	Remarks and introduction of the Minister of Defence and War Veterans Affairs	Minister of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture - Hon. Dr. K. Coventry
11:45hrs	Remarks and introduction of the Guest of Honour	Minister of Defence and War Veterans Affairs and National Chairman of the Ruling Party ZANU-PF Cde. O.C.Z. Muchinguri-Kashiri
11:55hrs	Keynote Address	The Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe - Hon. Col. (Rtd) K. C. D. Mohadi
12:20hrs	Entertainment	
12:30hrs	Presentation of Gifts	Minister of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture - Hon. Dr. K. Coventry
12:35hrs	Vote of thanks by Host Chief	Mamba Garahwa
12:40hrs	Entertainment	
12:45hrs	End of official proceedings	



*Culture Month National Celebrations at Marega Primary School, Chipinge, Manicaland Province*

Zimbabweans within and in the diaspora, commemorated, celebrated and valorised our own cultural heritage, our creativity, our indigenous languages, our national pride and our identity in our diverse cultures that make us Zimbabweans. The month of May every year is National Culture Month, hence Zimbabwe joined the UNESCO Member States to celebrate World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development.

## 8.8 *Other IDIL 2022-2032 Commemorative Activities*

8.8.1 Several Community Radio Stations have been established countrywide, some with assistance from UNESCO. These radio stations primarily broadcast in the Indigenous Languages of the areas where the stations are located. For example, the Chipinge Community Radio broadcasts mainly in the ChiNdau language while the Binga Community Radio broadcasts in the ChiTonga language.

8.8.2 The Ministry of Information, Communication Technology and Courier Services has incorporated indigenous languages on the world digital platforms e.g. Google (Shona, Ndebele)

8.8.3 The following key public documents were translated into all the officially recognised indigenous languages in line with the objectives of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages:

- National Development Strategy 1 (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development)
- Consumer Protection Act (Ministry of Industry and Commerce)
- Compendium of Projects Implemented by the Second Republic of Zimbabwe (Office of the President and Cabinet)
- National Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation)
- Highway Code into Shona and English (Ministry of Transport)
- Zimbabwe Election Commission Delimitation Brochures (Ministry of Home Affairs)
- Constitution Amendments (Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs)
- Provincial Editions of Development Projects Implemented by the Second Republic (Office of the President and Cabinet)
- The Southern African Intangible Cultural Heritage (SAICH) based at Chinhoyi University of Technology has translated summaries of the 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage into indigenous languages.

- The National Language Institute at the Midlands State University translated the glossary of elementary science terms into all the officially recognised indigenous languages. The publications were launched in Gweru by the Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, Professor Dr Amon Murwira on 3 June 2024.

## 9.0 **Recommendations for the period 2024-2026**

The following are recommendations the Ministry of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture in collaboration with the UNESCO National Commission and UNESCO Regional Office could implement to commemorate the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The recommendations are not exhaustive but an attempt to summarise the most important actions to be taken in the first quarter of the International Decade for Indigenous Languages.

1. **Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns:** The Government through the relevant Ministries like the Ministry of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture; Ministries of Education and stakeholders to budget for national advocacy campaigns on IDIL activities.
2. **National Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages:** This is a high-level document presenting strategic action for localizing the Global Action Plan for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The National Action Plan (Strategic Plan 2022-2032) is developed by the Government of Zimbabwe through the Line Ministry in collaboration with language institutions and organisations. The National Action Plan will outline Zimbabwe's approach and course of action for localizing the Global Action Plan. The Plan should address local linguistic specificities, determine national priorities, establish governing structures and encourage the formation of National Language Committees. It is strongly recommended to start the process of securing funding for the National Action Plan early. When national opportunities are explored, it is prudent for the line Ministry to get in touch with the UNESCO Global Task Force to see what opportunities might be available.
3. **Institutional Action Plans:** These are language plans that are institutionally based at Universities, Colleges, Parliament etc. Institutional Action Plans are designed by both the public and private bodies.

4. **Language Survey:** Zimbabwe does not conduct censuses that count speaker numbers of its different languages. There is therefore an urgent need to conduct a language survey that will help the government to efficiently plan language activities and programmes in the country.
5. **Database for All Language Communities, Associations, Organisations and Institutions in the Country:** The process should be led by a National Coordinating Team in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture and the UNESCO National Commission. Registration with the Ministry of Sport, Arts and Recreation shall be made compulsory. This database will be used to develop a language atlas for Zimbabwe which will be a map showing the distribution of languages in the different provinces of the country.
6. **Setting up a Unit in the Ministry of Sport, Arts and Recreation:** This unit should be dedicated to language protection, promotion, development and revitalization.
7. **National Language Policy:** This policy should recognize the historical reality that even though English has become the language of wider communication, we are a multilingual society. This should be followed by a language policy in education which must legislate on practices about the languages or medium of instruction and languages of literacy used in basic education.
8. **Language Bill:** Efforts should be made to quickly put in place a Language Bill that will be promulgated to become an ACT to legally buttress the Language Policy. The envisaged Bill should regulate the use of indigenous languages of Zimbabwe. The Bill/Act must make it mandatory for all colleges and universities to teach and develop indigenous languages. It (i.e. the Bill) must provide for the establishment of the National Languages Board and National Languages Fund.
9. **Establishment of a National Languages Board:** This Board which should be inclusive in its composition must be established urgently. Members of the Board must be appointed using public and transparent processes. It will serve as a regulatory body and watchdog for enforcing the use of indigenous languages and their development thus its role will also be advisory to the government.
10. **Set up a Publishing House:** The government should have its own publishing house similar to the defunct Rhodesia Literature Bureau. The publishing house should be established immediately to publish dictionaries

- for all officially recognised indigenous languages and textbooks/literature books to be used in primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions.
11. **Annual Progress Reports:** The Annual Progress Report shall be a document that summarises actions taken by the Government through the line Ministry on the implementation of the National Action Plan. These annual national reports will culminate into a final decade report that will summarise the outcomes and outputs at the end of the implementation of the National Action Plan.

Signed



12/06/24

**Professor W. Magwa (PhD)**

**Distribution**

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