



Chapter 4

Indigenous languages and South Africa's media environment



Cyril Madlala

Cyril Madlala was head of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government Communication from 2009 to 2014. He established the weekly isiZulu government newspaper, Simama KZN, which is distributed throughout the province as an insert in Ilanga and Isolezwe. He has served previously as Editorial Director: The Natal Witness Printing and Publishing Company; Editor and Publisher: UmAfrika newspaper; Editor: The Independent on Saturday and as parliamentary and political correspondent for the Sunday Times.

Introduction and context

It was the founding father of South African democracy, former President Nelson Mandela, who observed: 'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart.'

The broadening of the media horizon with the advent of democracy in our country has presented further layers of growth opportunities for the industry. The birth (and demise) of several new communications platforms testifies to the vibrancy of the market. Investors with deep pockets have ventured into initiatives as bold as the establishment of a brand new media house and the buying out of foreign-owned entity.

The New Age Media Ltd, owned by the Gupta family with strong ties to the ANC government, launched its first publication, the *New Age*, in 2010. This was followed in 2013 by a satellite

news channel, Africa News Network (ANN7). The *New Age* is a national English daily that seeks not only to survive, but to thrive where the traditional powerhouses are gasping for breath amid declining circulations and plummeting profits.

ANN7 is South Africa's third 24-hour news channel. It broadcasts on MultiChoice's DStv satellite television service and covers segments ranging from politics, to business, sports and entertainment news. The political connection between The New Age Media Ltd and the ruling African National Congress has resulted in a partnership with government departments and state-owned entities that ensures a steady revenue stream, with 'sold for copies' totaling nearly 50 000⁶ according to executive at the *New Age*. Advertising space, in December 2012 and January 2013 was bought largely by parastatals (48 per cent), other government departments (28 per cent), the private sector (17 per cent) and the Gupta family companies (10 per cent).⁷

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart.

Table 1: SA Newspaper Circulation (2012)⁵

Newspaper	Drop in circulation figures (2012)		Percentage drop
<i>Rapport</i>	220 494	183 187	16.9 %
<i>Sunday Times</i>	451 676	420 066	7%
<i>City Press</i>	135 148	121 137	10.4%
<i>Saturday Beeld</i>	69 109	59 690	13.6%
<i>Daily Sun</i>	336 319	291 132	13.5%
<i>The Star</i>	105 686	100 805	4.6%

Most newspapers have recorded a dramatic drop in circulation over the past few years. Research has shown that readers are hungry for news written in indigenous languages though – and some, such as *Isolezwe*, have recorded circulation increases.

The jury is out on the long-term sustainability of the business model.

Another major transaction in the media industry, the purchase of Independent News & Media SA by Sekunjalo Independent Media Consortium has restored to South Africans ownership of a large media house that was previously foreign owned. Independent Newspapers was already operating in the indigenous language market through the high flying *Isolezwe* offering, and this newspaper has been retained.

The pre-1994 South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was a tool brazenly used to perpetuate apartheid ideology, as was evident from programming designed to promote ethnicity and tribalism through stations such as the then Radio Zulu and Radio Xhosa. Commentary on current affairs, often echoing the views of the Nationalist Party, was the mandatory staple diet for the national broadcaster's indigenous language radio stations. This explains why the SABC's radio and television news pre-1994 was received with scepticism by pro-democracy forces, who relied primarily on alternative voices such as Capital Radio and Channel 702.

Twenty years into our democracy, the airwaves have been liberated. The number of radio stations has grown substantially. In 2013, there were 18 radio stations run by the SABC and 17 commercial stations (this excludes community radio, where over 160 stations have been licensed).⁸ More and more new entrants, such as Power FM in Gauteng and Vuma FM in

KwaZulu-Natal, continue to emerge, further diluting the influence of the SABC. Language diversity is most successful within the broadcast environment, with stations broadcasting in all eleven official languages to the nine provinces. SABC TV has also seen major change – with TV channels expanding from seven in December 1991, to 180 by December 2012.⁹ TV stations have also grown, with e-tv being launched in 1998 as a national free-to-air broadcaster, MultiChoice launching a new digital satellite service, and four more subscription services



being awarded licences by Icasa in 2007 (although not all have been launched). The spectacular success within the broadcast environment has opened up additional platforms to air indigenous language movies, soaps and documentaries, but funding remains a challenge

Advances in technology have also enhanced communication methods. Cellular telephony is as much of the rich and educated South African's daily life as it is of the poor subsistence woman farmer in the remote village. The playing field remains uneven, however, as the cost to communicate is high.

As the gap between the rich and the poor widens in South Africa, these advances in technology do not necessarily translate into universal access for all. While the democratic government did much to try and narrow the gap through the

Language diversity is most successful within the broadcast environment, with stations broadcasting in all eleven official languages to the nine provinces.

setting up of the Universal Service and Access Agency of South Africa, this agency has been mixed in controversy amid allegations of fraud and maladministration when it should have dedicated its energies to fulfilling the mandate to ensure that every South African has universal access to broadband by 2020.

Advances in technology have also enhanced communication methods.

While levels of success may fluctuate, what is beyond doubt is that after 20 years of freedom there is a multiplicity of voices in the media. While the voices of wealthy urban dwellers are more numerous, many more platforms exist for poor rural people to interact with, and as the number of media platforms continues to rise it is important to pause and reflect on whether the vast majority of South Africans who only feel comfortable when communicating in indigenous languages are being carried along. Are the messages that are finding expression in the many new voices in the media going to the heads or hearts of South Africans? Government might be shouting from the rooftops about the better life it has created but what matters is whether these messages are finding their way into the hearts of those who, prior to 1994, had every reason to be deeply sceptical of messages about and by the government. All this growth notwithstanding, until all languages are reflected equitably on all platforms we can hardly talk of the kind of diversity that would be embraced by all citizens.

This chapter will consider the use of indigenous languages in the South African media, with a particular focus on the print and broadcast sectors of the media industry, more especially those in KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, the chapter will explore what government is doing, and can do, to support and ensure the survival of indigenous languages.

Indigenous languages, government and media plans

Community members speak to each other in a language they understand. According to Census 2011, isiZulu is the most common home language, spoken by 20 per cent of South Africans, followed by isiXhosa at 16 per cent, whereas English and Setswana tie at 8.2 per cent each.

The last census showed that English is the first language for an increasing number of South Africans (a one-million people increase), although this constitutes only 9.6 per cent of the population. As integration takes root in the new South Africa and the doors to decent education open up for black African children, proficiency in the English language seems to be the desired outcome by most parents, which explains the upsurge in the numbers of English speakers as reflected in the latest census. So-called 'Model C' accents, accompanied by disdain for the vernacular, are increasingly becoming defining features of those born after the dawn of freedom.

The abandonment of vernacular languages is confirmed by the *South Africa Survey*, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations, which has noted that the number of public single-medium African language schools has declined since 2008, from 7.2 per cent of all single-medium schools to 4.6 per cent in 2012. Of all the official African languages used as a medium of instruction in single-medium schools, only isiXhosa saw an increase in the number of schools, from 278 in 2008 to 317 in 2012. The report points out, however, that isiXhosa single medium schools accounted for only three per cent of all such schools. The usage of isiZulu had, for the same period, declined from 188 to 85 schools, meaning that isiZulu single-medium schools accounted for

According to Census 2011, isiZulu is the most common home language, spoken by 20 per cent of South Africans.

only 0.8 per cent of all single-medium schools in 2012. Significantly, English is the preferred language for 81 per cent of all public single-medium schools.

Releasing the findings in March 2014, Institute of Race Relations researcher Thuthukani Ndebele observed that: 'Most pupils learn in an African language at foundation phase, but switch to either English or Afrikaans as early as Grade 4. The decline in the use of African languages in schools is evidently not a choice made at tertiary level, but is exercised by parents and pupils at the early schooling stages.'

Releasing the findings in March 2014, Institute of Race Relations researcher Thuthukani Ndebele observed that: 'Most pupils learn in an African language at foundation phase, but switch to either English or Afrikaans as early as Grade 4. The decline in the use of African languages in schools is evidently not a choice made at tertiary level, but is exercised by parents and pupils at the early schooling stages.'

Unabashedly alienated from their traditional roots, the new generation of African children increasingly can hardly read the mother tongue and are not inclined to learn to write properly in isiZulu, Sepedi or Setswana. There seems to be a perception that the mother tongue is backward – that it is not a language of commerce and of the digital global village.

Mandla Langa, an author/poet and media expert¹⁰ in an address to the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) in 2014 further emphasised this: Our languages are in trouble. You just have to listen to certain radio stations – we used to call them jukeboxes in the past – that present an aesthetic that's so remote from the lives and loves of our people. The disc jockeys – because I cannot call them anything else – outdo one another in aping pseudo-African-American accents or gangsta slang. They have no idea of the struggles of those self-same Americans to preserve their African roots after being kidnapped and sold off as slaves in the plantations. Malcolm X has commented

on the basis of spirituals like "I couldn't hear nobody pray."¹¹

It is not only in South Africa that indigenous languages are not being properly passed on to the younger generation in schools and homes. Professor Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche, the president of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria has lamented that research pointed to an average 25 per cent of children below 11 years who were unable to converse in their parents' mother tongue.

The Vanguard of Nigeria reported in February 2014 that Professor Ohiri-Aniche had told the Unesco Mother Language Day Celebration in Abuja that research projected that in two to three generations Nigeria's 400 indigenous languages would be extinct. Some were already dead and forgotten, while another 152 were on the brink of extinction. The solution being proposed there is similar to the South African government approach: every child should be taught in their vernacular language at primary and secondary school levels. In Nigeria this was prescribed in the national policy on education as far back as 1977, but the tide is not turning, as more citizens continue to opt for English, the official language of the country.

Unesco, which has conducted research on this issue, points out that language endangerment and disappearance is a global phenomenon – every region and almost every country has been affected:

The most important thing that can be done to keep a language from disappearing is to create favourable conditions for its speakers to speak the language and teach it to their children. This often requires national policies that recognise and protect minority languages, education systems that promote mother-tongue instruction, and creative collaboration between community members and linguists to develop a writing system and introduce formal instruction in the language. Since the most crucial factor is the attitude of the speaker community toward its own language, it is essential to create a social and political environment that encourages

Our languages are in trouble.

multilingualism and respect for minority languages so that speaking such a language is an asset rather than a liability.¹²

Fortunately, the South African democratic state has recognised that it cannot preside over the demise of African languages, and is taking steps to ensure that our new freedom and educational opportunities do not inadvertently also contribute towards the marginalisation of indigenous languages. *The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* affirms the government's approach that universities need to take further the Department of Basic Education's language policy aimed at ensuring that ultimately African children are taught in the mother tongue. The White Paper noted that the demise of African languages at university level posed a further threat to linguistic diversity in South Africa. The University of KwaZulu-Natal has already taken the bold initiative to work towards being a dual-medium educational institution by making isiZulu compulsory for first-year students who don't speak the language. But although there are initiatives underway to address the issues of preserving and developing African languages, there are still many shortcomings within the media sector.

History of the black press in South Africa

A brief look at the evolution of the black press in South Africa helps to locate the context of the language debate in the media today.

Christian missionaries of various denominations were responsible for establishing publications aimed at the African population. Studies by Les and Donna Switzer (*The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho – a descriptive bibliographic guide to African, Coloured and Indian newspapers, newsletters and magazines 1836 -1976*) cite the first recorded publication as having been produced by the London Missionary Society in Setswana in Kuruman, Northern Cape.

However, it is *Umshumayeli Wendaba*, published in isiXhosa between 1837 and 1841 in the Eastern Cape that is recognised as the pioneering newspaper for the African market in southern Africa.

The work of the missionaries in setting up newspapers in other parts of southern Africa is well documented. These included *UmAfrika*, the Roman Catholic Church's isiZulu newspaper initially established in 1910 as *Izindaba Zabantu* in Mariannhill, in Natal. *Isigidimi sama Xosa*, started in 1876, is lauded as the first African newspaper edited by blacks in southern Africa. A remarkable historical achievement was when blacks established their own independent newspapers, most notably the English/Xhosa weekly *Imvo Zabantsundu*, the first black-owned and controlled newspaper in South Africa in 1884, and Dr John Langalibalele Dube's Zulu-English *Ilanga lase Natal* in 1903.

Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.

This period was followed by a wave of periodicals by political parties, such as *Abantu-Batho* edited by the ANC's Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme and *Izwi Labantu* under Dr Walter Benson Rubusana. *Inkundla ya Bantu* was established in 1946. The issue of English as the preferred language in newspapers targeting black Africans is not a new phenomenon of the 'Model C School' generation. As early as 1862, a trend was set by *Indaba* for a publication aimed at the African community to publish in both English and a vernacular language.

English, moreover, was clearly the favoured medium of communication for African, coloured and Indian publications. *Bantu World*, for example, was published in English and six other languages.

Umshumayeli Wendaba

UmAfrika,

Izindaba Zabantu

Isigidimi sama Xosa

Imvo Zabantsundu

Ilanga lase Natal

Abantu-Batho

Izwi Labantu

Inkundla ya Bantu

Indaba

Bantu World

English had always dominated the news pages, however, and articles in vernacular languages were gradually phased out in the 1950s. All of (Jim) Bailey's publications and most of the political newspapers, pictorial and photo-story magazines were in English. Even government publications relied heavily on English before the advent of 'Bantu' education in 1954.

The traditional stronghold of the vernacular press – religious newspapers, newsletters and magazines – gradually gave way to inter-denominational publications written in English for a multiracial and increasingly secular audience in the 1960s and 1970s.¹³

This is largely the scenario that obtained at the dawn of democracy in 1994.

Post 1994: The constitutional imperatives, government initiatives and community media

It was imperative for the new democratic state to restore the dignity of its entire citizenry by instituting measures to give meaning to the injunction in one of the founding provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 which directs that: 'Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.'

The official languages are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.

The founding fathers of our Constitution also deemed it proper that the Pan South African Language Board be established by national legislation to 'promote, and create conditions for the development and use of all official languages'. A national language

policy framework was developed to promote language equity. Two major changes were of particular interest to the media. The first was the establishment of the SABC as the public (as opposed to state) broadcaster. The SABC was to 'encourage the development of South African expression by providing in the official languages a wide range of programming (SABC Charter Chapter IV of the Broadcasting Act 4 of 1999).

not survive owing to lack of funding to sustain them in the long term.

By 2012, SABC TV channels were struggling to meet their language diversity mandate. English dominated SABC programming (76 per cent) even though English is spoken as a first language by only eight per cent of South Africans. Almost 65 per cent of locally produced content was also in English, with other languages trailing behind: Afrikaans (six per cent), isiZulu (five per cent), isiXhosa, Sesotho and Tshivenda (three per cent)¹⁴. Despite good intentions, 20 years into our democracy we are still struggling with ensuring language diversity – even in the public media space.

The MDDA Act, 2002 (Act 14 of 2002), was also passed 'to help create an enabling environment for media development and diversity that is conducive to public discourse and which reflects the needs and aspirations of all South Africans'. The agency has also been entrusted with the responsibility to 'encourage ownership and control of, and access to, media by historically disadvantaged communities as well as by historically diminished indigenous language and cultural groups'. Through the work of the MDDA, the democratic state has begun the arduous task of levelling the playing field by giving support to indigenous language media through encouraging the development of human resources and training and capacity building, particularly among the previously less privileged. The more than 218 community radio stations in the country, broadcasting mostly in indigenous languages and licensed since 1995, indicate the extent to which the country has gone towards freeing itself from the stranglehold that was the apartheid-era SABC.

Many rural communities are today exposed to more information in their own languages through community radio than ever before. The National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) boasts of a combined 8.7 million listeners throughout the country. Gradually, the memory of the poisonous diet of homeland government propaganda that dominated the airwaves 20 years ago is being erased.



The Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) has been given the task to support indigenous language media. As a result, a number of community and small commercial print media newspapers have emerged.

The Independent Broadcasting Authority Act 153 of 1993 reinforced this by regulating that broadcasting should 'promote the provision of a diverse range of sound and television services on a national, regional and local level which, when viewed collectively, cater for all languages and cultural groups and provide entertainment, education and information'.

These commitments resulted in all 11 languages across the nine provinces being represented. In 2005, the public broadcaster was also granted licences for two regional television stations to be broadcast in indigenous languages – but the stations, to be known as SABC4 and SABC5, did

Through support rendered to initiatives that promote literacy and a culture of reading, the MDDA points to a number of publications in indigenous languages.

Among the beneficiaries from its interventions in various provinces are the following:

- In the Eastern Cape, *Idikelethu*, *Nemato Voice* and *Taxi Talk*, all published in isiXhosa.
- In the Free State, *Masilonyana* and *Free State News*, published in Sesotho.
- In KwaZulu-Natal, *Intuthuko News* and *Iqhawe*, both in isiZulu.
- In North West, *Leseding* and *Ponelopele News* in Setswana.
- In Limpopo, Balaodi Publishers, who publish *Seipone* in Sepedi, Xitsonga and Tshivenda; *Thavela* published in Xitsonga and *Northern News* in Setswana and Sepedi.
- In Mpumalanga, *Inzalama* and *Coal City*, both published in isiNdebele and SiSwati, and *Ihlokohloko* in isiNdebele.
- In the Northern Cape, *Kasi to Kasi* in Afrikaans and isiXhosa.

By its own admission, for the MDDA the print media remains a fiercely 'contested terrain', prompting the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Lumko Mtinde, to observe: 'We still carry the baggage/legacy of our past where one language dominated most official communication, whilst it was Afrikaans in the apartheid era; English is now the language of business choice, leaving the rest of our 11 languages to fight their way in a playing field that is not at all levelled. How can it be levelled, when skills development and working conditions still reflect the disparities in power relations, which are still based on language, race, gender and class? Language does become a tool of exclusion in big mainstream media in South Africa, as is still mostly in English and Afrikaans. It's against this background that the MDDA board has decided to focus support on media produced in indigenous languages.'¹⁵

This suggests that despite commendable commitment by the government to stimulate more language diversity in the media environment through legislative and financial

support mechanisms, we celebrate 20 years of democracy having made remarkable strides in a war not about to be won.

This is because the evolution of the media looks set to follow the trend of the 1960s and 1970s when English entrenched itself as the preferred language of African communities.

Mainstream broadcasting and newspapers – use of indigenous languages

Broadcast media in South Africa have done far better than print media at promoting language diversity. Numerous radio stations continue to target given language groups (such as Phalaphala FM which broadcasts in Tshivenda) and all 11 languages across the nine provinces are represented on the airwaves.

Ukhozi FM, has more than seven million listeners, targets mainly the Nguni languages market – and has by far the biggest audience in broadcasting. (Yet isiZulu language purists despair by the day as they hear less and less proper usage and grammar. An odd English word that could have slipped in here and there in the past has given way to broadcasts peppered with the queen's language during certain popular programmes.) SABC TV cannot even boast of the same level of diversity. English language broadcasting still dominates SABC 1, 2 and 3 (76 per cent) and local content programming is also mainly in English. Even within the public broadcast field challenges remain.

Language diversity in the print media environment is even worse, even though research suggests that readers are hungry for news written in indigenous languages. For example, isiZulu newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal are defying the odds as they continue to record phenomenal growth amid dwindling circulations across the board. This is attributable in part to the fact that the language is spoken at home by a fifth of the South African population.

Ilanga, established by Dr Dube as *Ilanga lase Natal* in 1903, has survived many turbulent periods, has celebrated its centenary, and by 2012 was still sitting comfortably with a circulation of close to 115 000. More recently, though, October/December 2013 Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) figures show that it too has seen a drop in circulation, to 95 994. At the same time, its English counterparts have been shrinking in circulation and influence, as figures by the ABC confirm. The proprietors' decision to expand into the highly contested Sunday newspaper territory and succeed, despite recent industrial action upheavals by staff, has served to confirm that the isiZulu press market is yet to be exploited to the fullest.

Nothing, perhaps, could have illustrated the point better than the dramatic entry into the scene by Independent Newspapers' *Isolezwe* after the company lost the contract to manage, print and distribute *Ilanga*. The fallout was particularly unpleasant and the parting of ways remarkably acrimonious, considering that it had been Independent Newspapers' forebears, the Argus Group, that had sold *Ilanga* to a political party, Inkatha Freedom Party, in 1987 in what remains one of the most controversial transactions in the history of newspaper acquisitions in this country.

Launched in 2002 with a circulation of under 30 000, the Monday to Friday edition of *Isolezwe* had by the end of December 2013 reached a circulation of 107 119 copies, making it the third highest circulating daily newspaper in the country after the *Daily Sun* and *The Times*, according to the ABC. Reporting on the latest performances, the Bureau said in February 2014 that the Saturday edition, *Isolezwe ngoMgqibelo*, had recorded the largest growth for weekend newspapers for the previous quarter (October to December 2013). At 82 339 copies, it was remarkable to recall that the debut edition in 2011 had sold 56 166 copies. Similarly, the Sunday offering, *Isolezwe ngeSonto*, had grown from 42 489 in March 2008 to 88 026 in the same period.

When *Isolezwe* achieved a remarkable 1 049 000 average issue readers in 2013 (All Media and

Products survey), the editor Sazi Hadebe told *The Media* magazine: 'Readers see it as a quality newspaper – well laid out with the latest news and attention to grammar and spelling.' He added that contributors wrote about subjects ranging from isiZulu culture to politics and humour, while periodic changes kept the content fresh.

The industry needs to explore growth of African languages. Readers are hungry for news to be told in their mother tongue. The growth of *Ilanga* and *Isolezwe* newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal is proof that there is a market for such diversity.

In presenting to the Print and Digital Media Technical Task Team (PDMTTT) in February 2013, the veteran broadcaster Dumile Mateza reinforced the view that: 'The industry needs to explore growth of African languages. Readers are hungry for news to be told in their mother tongue. The growth of *Ilanga* and *Isolezwe* newspapers in KwaZulu-Natal is proof that there is a market for such diversity.'¹⁶

The foray by the *Sunday Times* into the isiZulu market did not last. Launched in November 2010, it had folded by the first quarter of 2013. It had no discernible identity of its own and sought to outdo *Ilanga* and *Isolezwe* at their own game by translating into isiZulu articles initially written for entirely different types of audiences in other English sister publications. The isiZulu edition of the *Sunday Times* ended up being neither a perfect clone of the English *Sunday Times* nor a worthy impostor warrior in the isiZulu newspaper wars. It did not speak to the hearts of those readers, while unlike the *isiZulu Sunday Times* that relied on a skeleton staff and translations from sister publications, *Isolezwe* initiates the bulk of its content to suit its market.

The failure of the *Sunday Times* Zulu project was followed by the closure of *UmAfrika* by its new owners, Media24, signalling the closure of a chapter in isiZulu publishing that had remained for more than a century a breathing testament to the fruits of labour of those missionaries who had come to South Africa to preach to the natives of Natal the motto of 'Ora et Labora' (Pray and Work).

The issue of language diversity in the media environment in South Africa tends of course to anchor around isiZulu media platforms in KwaZulu-Natal because that is where the country registers the presence of extremely powerful media in indigenous languages, namely Ukhozi FM and the two giants in African language newspapers, *Ilanga* and *Isolezwe*. The hasty retreat by the publishers of the *Sunday Times* from the isiZulu market probably best explains why in the rest of the country we have not seen massive investment in indigenous language newspaper publishing. It is not a territory for those expecting quick returns. Traditionally, those who plough money into newspapers do not expect to break even in the first two years – and that was before the advent of the free online news and other social media wobbled the best that the world has ever had to offer in the form of newspapers. For centuries we all looked up to the British and the American templates for successful and profitable newspapering. The ideal of a truly diverse media which reflects the richness of all our African languages might therefore remain a pipedream.

Government and the media – ways to ensure the survival of indigenous languages

While investors may simply walk away from unprofitable ventures, the option not to contest this space because of unfavourable trading conditions is not open for the South African government.

At the 20th anniversary of democracy the measure of our success has to be the extent

to which we have responded to the injunction (of one of the founding provisions of the Constitution): 'Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages' (Chapter 1: 6(2)).

There are a few practical measures that government might want to adopt. The first is to channel a significant portion of the government's massive advertising expenditure towards the vernacular media, both print and electronic, in all provinces. A most welcome development in this regard is a call early in 2014 by Parliament's portfolio committee on communications for community and small commercial media to be allocated at least 30 per cent of government advertising. This move is supported by both the State-Owned Entities Communicators Association and the State-Owned Enterprises Procurement Forum. It will also help struggling indigenous language media not only to survive, but also to streamline their operations better on the back of guaranteed revenue streams.

An argument often advanced is that the emerging indigenous community media is too small, fractured, and not structured properly as enterprises, to comply with the onerous requirements of the Public Finance Management Act.

But as the latest census has shown, English is taking over even in African households. Those who contribute towards the preservation of indigenous languages by keeping afloat media promoting the use of these languages, need to be supported by government through advertising and there should be a policy directive to this effect in all three spheres of government. The MDDA is playing its role, but government as a whole should make more money available to help sustain efforts to promote language diversity in our media.

In communication and information, Unesco 'supports the use of local languages in the media and promotes multilingualism in cyberspace'.¹⁷ Not enough information has cascaded down to all levels of our society. Lack of effective

communication between the political leadership and the community is often cited as the reason people resort to service delivery protests; more often than not, the municipalities in question have limited capacity to produce even a decent newsletter in the local language to remain in touch with the people. Therefore, as a second measure, government should investigate the feasibility of assisting each and every municipality to produce a newsletter in the predominant home language of the area.

After all, Madiba was correct. The good news of 20 years of freedom and democracy needs to reach the hearts of our communities by talking to them in their language, thus touching their hearts. This will also serve to ensure that the commendable efforts of the missionaries who came to these shores to introduce indigenous language media are also commemorated, and that the vernacular press they established does not become a victim of our freedom and democracy as the new generation discards, and frowns upon, what defines them: their mother tongue.