

# **ALIMITEDEMPIRICALSTUDYOFLANGUAGEPOLICYANDPLANNINGAT LOCALAUTHORITIESINTHEWESTERNCAPE**

**By**

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September2000**

## **1.BACKGROUND**

Following complaints lodged with the Western Cape Language Committee regarding monolingual direction signs in the City of Tygerberg and the Helderberg Municipality, the Language Committee decided on 6 June 2000 to not only investigate the matter, but to extend the investigation to language policy and planning at all local authorities in the Western Cape. The survey was undertaken in terms of the provisions contained in section 6 and specifically section 6(3)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), the Constitution of the Western Cape (Act 1 of 1998), the Western Cape Provincial Languages Act (Act 13 of 1998). The principles contained in item 4.7 of the final draft of the Language Policy and Plan for South Africa and item 7 of the Draft Language Policy for the Western Cape were also taken into consideration.

The upcoming municipal elections, the amalgamation of different municipalities into fewer, but larger municipalities, as well as the establishment of the Unicity were taken into consideration. At this stage it is important to focus the attention of local authorities in the Western Cape on the different aspects regarding language policy and planning.

## **2.STATINGTHEPROBLEM**

There has never been a study of the language policy and planning of all local authorities in the Western Cape within the legal framework mentioned above.

Until now there apparently has been no clear idea at local authority level as to how the language clause in the Constitution (section 6) should be applied in the local authorities. There are no clear guidelines in the Constitution indicating when and to what extent the official languages have to be used in the official business of the municipalities and municipalities are dealt with separately from national and provincial governments. In terms of section 6(3)(b) of the Constitution there is only one demographic criterion to be used and that is the language usage and preferences of their residents.

Legislation and the draft policy as referred to in point 1 are of course currently providing the necessary guidance. The Constitution of the Western Cape gives recognition to the equal status of the three official languages, Afrikaans, English

and Xhosa. The Western Cape Provincial Languages Act provides for the protection and development of the three official languages and other indigenous languages in the Western Cape. Item 4.7 of the Draft Language Policy and Plan for South Africa, drafted by an advisory panel to the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, and item 7 of the Draft Language Policy for the Western Cape, drafted by the Western Cape Language Committee, provide that local authorities must determine the language usage and preference of their communities in an *enabling provincial framework*. The Western Cape Provincial Languages Act and the Draft Language Policy provide this enabling provincial framework for the Western Cape.

After the language usage and preferences have been determined, the local authorities, in consultation with their communities must develop, introduce and implement a language policy.

### **3.OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the study are:

- to determine policy decisions regarding language policy and planning and municipalities' accommodation of trilingualism
- to determine the external and internal language use of municipalities
- to determine whether and how municipalities ascertained the language usage and preferences of their residents and employees
- to determine the utilisation of language resources such as translators and interpreters
- to identify language obstacles
- to encourage the use of Xhosa, Khoi and San languages and sign language, and to determine the promotion of trilingualism in the private sector.

### **4.METHODOLOGY**

On 6 July 2000, 199 letters in Afrikaans, Xhosa and English were sent to all the mayors/chairpersons and chief executive officers/town clerks of 98 local authorities in the Western Cape together with an Afrikaans, Xhosa and English copy of the Western Cape Provincial Languages Act. The language preferences of the office bearers were determined telephonically before the letters were posted.

The letters explained the background to this survey and contained 12 open ended unstructured questions to which responses were requested before 7 August 2000. See Annexure 1.

The demographic distribution of the persons to whom questionnaires were sent, is as follows:

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Afrikaans</b>	<b>Xhosa</b>	<b>English</b>
Mayor	85	10	84	7	4
CEO/TownClerk	91	10	97	0	4
Chairperson	3	0	2	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>

This postal survey was concluded on 31 August 2000. Replies from 37 authorities were received with gratitude and appreciation. Either the mayor or the chief executive officer of a specific municipality supplied answers. This represents a response of 37,8%. The full results of the postal survey are contained in Annexure 2.

Up to and including 31 August 2000, the following municipalities had responded to the postal survey:

Ashton, Aurora, Belvidere Estate Transitional Council, Beaufort West, Blaauwberg, Citrusdal, Clanwilliam Transitional Council, De Doorns, Franschhoek, George, Gouritsmond Transitional Council, Great Brak River (mayor), Great Brak River (town clerk), Helderberg, Hermanus, Cape Metropolitan Council, Knysna, Klawer, Ladismith, Laingsburg, Leeu-Gamka Transitional Council, Malmesbury Transitional Council, Montagu, Moorreesburg, Oostenberg, Oudtshoorn, Plettenberg Bay, Prins Albert, Prince Alfred Hamlet, Riversdale, City of Tygerberg, Stanford, Swellendam, Municipality for the Vanrhynsdorp region, Velddrif, Villiersdorp, Wellington and the West Coast Peninsula Transitional Council.

This survey is called a limited empirical research because individual or focus group interviews were not held.

## **5. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

(See complete explanation in Annexure 2.)

### **5.1 Policy documents on language use in your local authority**

Most municipalities do not have any policy document on language. Citrusdal requests that a uniform language policy for the new category B authorities be determined instead of an individual policy for each municipality. With reference to this study, the task team for policy on community participation for the Oostenberg Municipality will be requested to establish a framework for a language policy.

The following municipalities have policy documents incorporating council decisions in particular:

- Blaauwberg Municipality

As a result of practical and cost considerations English is used for all communication and documentation. Council members may speak English or Afrikaans during council meetings. Documentation must be processed in the language of the original documentation.

- Franschhoek Municipality

Afrikaans is used for minutes and agendas. Any council member, official or member of the public may communicate with the council in Afrikaans, Xhosa or English.

- Helderberg Municipality

English is used for agendas and minutes with annexures in the language of origin. Should these be in Afrikaans or Xhosa they are translated into English.

- Hermanus Municipality

In 1998 this municipality envisaged allowing council members freedom of choice during council meetings by providing a comprehensive interpreting service. Currently written communication is mainly in Afrikaans, but for oral communication the speaker language of preference is used.

- City of Tygerberg

English is the working language of the organisation. Employees may request that messages be translated into Afrikaans or Xhosa. As a result of time and financial constraints, urgent communication is in English only to avoid delays caused by translation. Documents for agendas or documents addressed to the staff are in English. Sometimes these are available in Afrikaans, Xhosa and English.

## **5.2 Policy decisions on language matters**

From the response it would appear as if agendas and minutes for council meetings are compiled mostly in Afrikaans or English. If in Afrikaans, it is due to the fact that most council members are Afrikaans speaking. If in English, it is because all council members can read and understand English. Hermanus Municipality estimates that it would cost R1,5 million per annum to supply its agendas and minutes in all three official languages.

Ashton Municipality is the only municipality where debates at council meetings are held in Afrikaans, Xhosa and English. Oudtshoorn Municipality alternates monthly between the use of Afrikaans and English for agendas and minutes.

Following on the letter from the Language Committee Plettenberg Bay Municipality identified some shortcomings. Matters addressed in the letter are currently being discussed in order to establish the equitable use of the three official languages by the municipality. e

The West Coast Peninsula Transitional Council states its policy decisions in a nutshell: "We treat the three official languages with respect".

### **5.3 Language composition of community and the way in which it was determined**

- Ashton: 58% Afrikaans, 40% Xhosa, 2% English
- Beaufort West: 20000 Coloured, 5000 Black, 5000 White
- Clanwilliam: Afrikaans by far
- Citrusdal: 99% Afrikaans, 0,5% English, 0,5% Xhosa/Sotho/Zulu
- George: 71% Afrikaans, 19% Xhosa, 8% English (Statistics South Africa)
- Gouritsmond: 98% Afrikaans, 2% English
- Great Brak River: 95% Afrikaans, 5% English, 0,5% Xhosa
- Hermanus: 63,1% Afrikaans; 21,2% Xhosa; 13,8% English; other 1,9%
- Knysna: 60% Afrikaans, 20% Xhosa, 20% English
- Klaver: 98% Afrikaans; 1% Xhosa, 1% English (Statistics South Africa)
- Leeu-Gamka: 99% Afrikaans (Clinic and community organisations)
- Malmesbury: 90% Afrikaans, 6% English, 4% Xhosa; greater preference given to Afrikaans soon as new category B municipality is established
- Oostenberg: Afrikaans 73,1%, English 15,4%, Xhosa 9,8% (information contained in the Oostenberg development profile compiled by the Directorate of Economic Development and Planning and is based on the 1996 census); Bloekombos/Wallacedene: 70,2% Xhosa
- Oudtshoorn: 85% Afrikaans, 10% Xhosa, 5% English
- Prince Alfred Hamlet: 99% Afrikaans, 1% English
- City of Tygerberg: Heartland of the Afrikaans -speaking population of the Cape Metropolitan Area (statistics by Die Burger)
- Stanford: 60% Afrikaans, 20% English, 20% Xhosa
- Swellendam: 65% Afrikaans, 35% English. (80 Xhosa households)
- Wellington: Afrikaans 90%

### **5.4 Oral and written language use for internal communication**

Internal communication is mostly in Afrikaans because most of the council members and employees are Afrikaans -speaking, or in English for practical and cost reasons or for the sake of convenience e.g. at Blaauwberg, Helderberg and City of Tygerberg. At Hermanus the ANC caucus requested that the agenda be compiled in English and that Afrikaans debates be interpreted into English. The

internal newsletters and information brochures are, however, published in all three official languages.

At the Cape Metropolitan Council and Ashton Municipality internal communication is in Afrikaans, Xhosa and English according to the language preferences of the employees and council members. At Villiersdorp Municipality internal communication is in Afrikaans and Xhosa.

### **5.5 Oral and written language use for external communication**

The frequency of the use of the three official languages increases during external communication with the public. Circulars, newsletters, advertisements, invitations, tender invitations, forms, etc. appear in Afrikaans, Xhosa and English. Attempts are made to serve the public in the language of their choice by means of interpreters and translators. As a rule correspondence is answered in the language in which it was received.

### **5.6 Equal access to municipal services by removing language obstacles**

Most of the municipalities experience few or no obstacles with the delivery of services. Hermanus Municipality has appointed Xhosa employees at service point to be able to render a client -friendly service. At Oostenberg Municipality telephonic enquiries are dealt with in the three official languages. Stanford Municipality has decided to appoint a cashier who can speak Afrikaans, Xhosa and English to serve the consumers in the language of their choice. The West Coast Peninsula Transitional Council makes provision for all three official languages to be spoken at the point of contact, thereby removing language related obstacles.

### **5.7 Language use on signboards and directions signs**

Signboards and direction sign mostly appear in Afrikaans and English. No mention is made of monolingual signboards or direction signs, although Velddrif Municipality selectively erects Afrikaans or English signboards and direction signs.

In the municipalities of Ashton and Stanford Afrikaans, Xhosa and English appear on signboards. The welcoming sign at the entrance to Klaverwer is in Afrikaans, Xhosa and English. According to the Cape Metropolitan Council any noticeboards and signs on the side of the road are in all three official languages.

## **5.8 Use of language resources such as interpreters and translators**

As a result of attempts to accommodate language diversity in the municipalities and to communicate effectively, most municipalities use interpreters and translators, but on a non-professional basis. This may include using a language practitioner employed by the municipality as at Villiersdorp Municipality, translation services, freelance translators and volunteers from the community and employees.

In most cases, municipal employees such as security officers and clerks do simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. Clearly, professional interpreting services are not used, apart from exceptional cases such as the Cape Metropolitan Council.

The cost factor seems to be a big problem. For example, according to the CMC, it costs R6000 to make one by-law available in Afrikaans, Xhosa and English. The rental of a sound system for simultaneous interpretation amounts to approximately R5,300 per month. Furthermore, a professional simultaneous interpreter costs R800 per council meeting and a consecutive interpreter at committee meetings R165 per hour.

## **5.9, 5.10, 5.11 Policy decisions on the promotion of Xhosa, Khoi and San languages and sign language**

No policy decisions have been made in this regard. From the responses it appears as if there is no need for it.

## **5.12 Promoting trilingualism amongst the business sector and the public**

Very little effort is being made to make the business sector and the public aware of trilingualism. Clanwilliam Municipality will bring the matter to the attention of its consumers in the next newsletter. De Doorns Municipality feels that it does not want to force English or Xhosa on a business community that is mostly Afrikaans-speaking. According to the Hermanus Municipality it is the duty of the Chamber of Business to make the business sector aware of trilingualism.

# **6. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **6.1 Written language policy**

To date no municipality in the Western Cape has given attention to the formulation of a written language policy. Policy documents that do exist are simply statements declaring either Afrikaans or English as the official working language of the municipality.

It is therefore proposed that every municipality in the Western Cape formulate a practically executable and affordable policy on trilingualism based on an enabling provincial framework and the draft language policy for the Western Cape. It must be based on the established language preferences and usage of the employees and residents of the specific municipality and will therefore differ from municipality to municipality.

## **6.2 Language preferences and usage**

More than 50% of the municipalities have official statistics on the language composition of their residents, but nowhere has a language audit been undertaken to determine the language preferences and usage. It would appear as if the main language in the Western Cape is Afrikaans, followed by English and the Xhosa. In Ashton, George, Hermanus and Oudtshoorn there are more Xhosa speakers than English speakers. In Knysna, Stanford and to a certain degree Malmesbury there are mostly Afrikaans speakers, but an equal number of Xhosa and English speakers.

It is important that the language preferences and usage of the residents be determined scientifically by means of a language audit. The language preferences and usage must at all times be borne in mind with language policy and planning. The language composition of a community should be reflected in the language preferences and usage of the council and municipality. The working language of a municipality should not be in conflict with the language preferences of the residents.

After completion of the language audit a trilingual language policy is formulated in consultation with the community. The language audit should be repeated on a regular basis, as the population and language composition is not static. As a result, the language policy is not rigid. Even if the overwhelming majority of the public favours a specific language, there is still justification and room for the implementation of a policy on trilingualism that must be budgeted for.

## **6.3 Internal and external communication**

In most municipalities internal oral and written communication is not based on the language preferences and usage of the employees and council members. It would appear from the survey that a pragmatic approach determines the language choice for internal communication. Debates and reports are either in Afrikaans or in English and if Xhosa is used during debates, it is interpreted by for instance a security officer or a clerk, but not by a professional interpreter. The necessary goodwill may exist, but the language that is understood by everyone becomes the dominant language for internal communication.

Conscious attempts are being made to communicate with the public in Afrikaans and English and often in Afrikaans, English and Xhosa. As far as the external communication with the public is concerned, the frequency of the use of the three



official languages is increasing noticeably. This especially applies to newsletters and notices. In all cases replies to correspondence are in the language in which it was received.

The way in which municipalities currently accommodate languages has inherent dangers. Strydom and Pretorius say in this regard, "Its extent of language accommodation relies largely on personalities, relationships of interpersonal language use. Should these informal mechanisms become dysfunctional and fail to prevent or address language conflict, there is nothing to fall back on which may provide an acceptable basis for its effectiveness.... For instance, any significant change in the demographics of council membership or the municipal workforce might radically alter the standing of a particular language in the internal and external communication of a municipality; present language accommodation might be the outcome of political compromise or expediency, wiped out by a different constellation of events in the future." (1999, Strydom, 39).

Few language-related obstacles were identified regarding service delivery. When the language needs and preferences have been determined, further obstacles may be identified. Especially the municipalities of Hermanus, Klawer, Oostenberg and Stanford are consciously attempting to provide fair access to services.

It is suggested that consensus should be reached between the employees and the council members about the working languages for internal communication, both intra- and inter-departmental, in the municipalities be determined on consensus, but no person must be prevented from using his/her language of preference. The language audit will determine the language needs and preferences of the residents and external communication will take place accordingly. Language-related obstacles will be identified during the language audit and must be eliminated to ensure equal and fair access to municipal services for everyone.

#### **6.4 Signboards and directions signs**

The language use on signboards and directions signs is primarily in Afrikaans and English. Once again there is greater sensitivity and respect for language diversity in smaller municipalities such as Ashton and Stanford where direction signs or signboards at municipal buildings are erected in Afrikaans, English and Xhosa. It must be emphasised that the Cape Metropolitan Councils' policy is to "erect any notice boards and signs on the side of the road in the three official languages". This survey gives no indication of monolingual direction boards even though it is very evident in certain large municipalities such as Helderberg and City of Tygerberg.

In terms of legislation and the draft language policy of the Western Cape, it is suggested that all signboards on municipal buildings should be trilingual.

Direction signs must be trilingual, but the language preference of the residents play an important role.

### **6.5 Interpreters and translators**

Ad hoc attempts are made to accommodate language diversity with the help of interpreters and translators. There is, however, no standard policy in this regard, which leads to untrained people being used and the quality of work is often unsatisfactory and unpredictable. Where professional translation and interpretation services are used, as in the CMC, very few problems are experienced with terminology and inaccurate translations and interpretation.

The use of language resources such as interpreters and translators has cost implications, but for efficient local government it is essential that information be conveyed by means of effective communication. Therefore, annual budgets must provide for interpreters and translators, whether they be freelancers or appointed on a part-time or permanent basis, and guidelines must be formulated based on international professional standards for their service conditions. They will be involved in internal and external communication.

### **6.6 Promotion of Xhosa, Khoi and San Languages and sign language**

It is appalling that no attempts are being made to encourage the use of Xhosa, Khoi and San languages and sign language. Apparently no need as such has been expressed for it. A language audit and language policy will have to address the matter urgently.

Furthermore, there is no co-operation between municipalities and the private sector to promote trilingualism. It appears as if municipalities are wary of intervening in the activities of the private sector. Still, the draft language policy for the Western Cape determines that the municipalities must encourage and support the private sector to develop their own language policy in accordance with the provincial language policy.

## **7. CLOSING REMARKS**

This survey revealed that no local authority has as yet formulated a language policy. The necessary preliminary work can already be done so that the new municipalities can implement their language policies after the local elections. A language audit should be done in every municipality to determine the language preferences and usage of the residents and council members. The language policy must be formulated in consultation with the public.

With reference to Du Plessis and Schuring's recommendations on multilingualism in the workplace, every big municipality can appoint a language committee or establish a language unit to be responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring a language policy. At small municipalities a specific person can be

responsible for the language desk to perform the same functions (Du Plessis and Schuring, 42, 43).

Trilingualism must be financed. Municipalities must adjust their budgets accordingly. Du Plessis and Schuring recommend that a formula of 0,1% of the salary account of the organisation be used. The costs are not recovered from the employees, but are current expenses that, as with other expenses, are included in the tax calculation. The smaller the organisation the less money there is for language matters (Du Plessis and Schuring, 41, 42).

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## **SOURCES CONSULTED**

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**Strydom, H A & Pretorius J L.** 1999. Language policy and planning: How do local governments cope with multilingualism? *Journal for Juridical Science* . 24(2):24-40