

LANGUAGE

INTRODUCTION

As South Africa's public broadcaster, the SABC embraces the constitutional duty to treat all the official languages equitably, and with equal respect. The Constitution also recognises the need to promote South African Sign Language and "the Khoi, Nama and San languages".

We are conscious of the important part the public broadcaster should play in facilitating the fulfilment of these rights, and pledge our commitment to working towards these goals.

This Language Policy is derived further from the Corporation's commitment to freedom of expression, which is protected by the Constitution, including the right of all South Africans to receive and impart information. We recognise that freedom of expression can be realised fully only when every South African can inform and be informed in their language of choice. Access to meaningful information would also empower South Africans to participate effectively in every facet of society.

We also recognise that language plays a crucial part in promoting and attaining the goals of building our democracy and our nation, and protecting and developing our uniquely diverse cultures. This is because the use and development of language is closely linked to the development of culture and identity. These matters are particularly important in our relatively new democracy, where language will be instrumental in its growth and development.

Owing to its virtually universal accessibility and use, the public broadcaster has a unique responsibility to broadcast programmes that promote development of national identity while supporting development of our languages and cultures. South Africa, and consequently the public broadcaster, is faced with a further challenge: that of bringing marginalised national languages, cultures and identities into the mainstream, so that they can develop and flourish, and become a core part of our nation building project.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

This policy takes into account the Constitution and a range of legislative and regulatory requirements — in particular those contained in the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act, the Broadcasting Act, and ICASA policies and regulations.

Drawing on these, the SABC commits itself to being the voice and vision of every South African. Accordingly, we

- provide a range of distinctive, creative and top quality programmes in all 11 official languages across our radio and television portfolio, and strive to reflect the needs of each language community in our programming
- maintain distinct and separate radio services in each of the 11 official languages
- treat all the official languages equitably on our television services
- integrate South Africa Sign Language into broadcasting as a means of making programming accessible to people with hearing disabilities
- strive to include other non-official languages spoken in South Africa, with particular emphasis on the Khoi, Nama and San languages.

In acting on these commitments the SABC will be guided by the following:

- The need for institutions, including the public broadcaster, to take practical and positive steps to treat all the official languages fairly
- The need to address the marginalisation of indigenous languages and South African Sign Language in recognition of the impact of the previous systematic marginalisation of those languages
- The obligation to reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity, and multilingual nature of South Africa while promoting national unity

- The SABC's responsibility to be responsive to the needs of all South Africans, including the deaf
- The importance of language in communication as the carrier of values, attitudes, culture and expression.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The SABC's primary role is to make its programmes accessible to all the audiences, and in that regard language is fundamental to meaningful communication. In keeping with this, the SABC aims to:

- Inform, educate and entertain South Africans in their home languages
- Promote understanding and acceptance of and between the linguistic and cultural groups in South Africa
- Contribute to continual development of the 11 official languages and South African Sign Language
- Promote multilingualism in South Africa.

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The SABC is, in terms of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act and the Broadcasting Act, required to provide broadcasting services in all the official languages and to cater specifically for the needs of people with hearing disabilities. Accordingly, this is an overarching policy, affecting many activities of the Corporation.

This policy should therefore be considered when the SABC:

- Develops strategic plans for the Corporation
- Develops business plans and budgets for the Corporation
- Formulates programme strategies, policies and plans for each radio station and television channel
- Determines training needs and strategies
- Develops audience research projects to gauge the needs of viewers and listeners and to assess response to programmes
- Formulates plans for universal service and access to broadcasting
- Investigates and formulates plans for the use of innovative technology.

USE OF LANGUAGE IN BROADCASTING

In fulfilling its duty to protect and nurture South Africa's official languages, the SABC strives to ensure that they are all spoken correctly. In doing so the SABC commits itself to celebrating the rich diversity of dialects and accents in each language group.

The SABC recognises that languages are dynamic, continually developing and adapting to circumstances; language in broadcasting should therefore take account of the evolution of languages.

Moreover, language usage should accord with the programme genre. It is fair to assume that more formal language would be used in news programmes, whereas more conversational, colloquial or everyday language would be used in drama.

Language in broadcasting should also take account of the social expectations and values of different language groups, and the right of every South African to be treated with respect and dignity. Language usage in broadcasting should therefore avoid giving offence and causing hurt unnecessarily. It should encourage respect and concern for everyone, and be free of elements such as prejudice, and racist and sexist connotations. The Programming Policy and the Policy on News, Current Affairs and Information Programming expand further on this issue.



OPERATING PRINCIPLES

In striving to play its part in reaching these common national goals, the SABC's Language Broadcasting Policy takes account of, and is shaped by, a number of operating principles:

- Use of groupings such as cognate, shared and widely understood languages so as to make the most cost effective use of scarce resources
- Special action on marginalised languages
- Attainment of language goals, including the use of South African Sign Language, firstly in targeted programme genres
- Combined use of unilingual and multilingual programming
- Coverage of events of national importance to promote the development of national identity, unity and nation building
- Fair allocation of resources to achieve quality in programmes on all the broadcasting platforms
- Application of appropriate technologies to achieve language coverage and access goals
- Use of research to understand audiences' language broadcasting needs
- Introduction of annual plans to focus implementation and monitoring of the Language Policy
- Development of mutually beneficial relationships with key social partners, notably the Pan South African Language Board.

These operating principles are elaborated on below.

RADIO

Radio is still the most widely used and most accessible broadcasting medium in South Africa. It is used in homes, cars, taxis, trains, malls and food courts. South Africans can listen to the radio all day and all night. As audiences have fragmented increasingly into niche markets there has arisen a special responsibility for the SABC, as the public broadcaster, to offer South Africans a wide range of programmes — irrespective of age, income or language. Accordingly, the SABC is charged with providing quality radio services in all 11 official languages. In making this pledge the SABC notes:

- The crucial part radio plays in the lives of many South Africans, as it is often the only medium available to them in their home language, and in many instances the only medium available at all
- The under-development of previously disadvantaged people and of their languages in South Africa, which must be redressed if we are to meet our commitment to delivering excellent radio services
- The unique part radio can play in promoting people's right to receive information, to express themselves, and to inform others.

The SABC further commits itself to providing quality radio programmes in non-official South African languages, in particular in the Khoi, Nama and San languages.

PROGRAMMING GUIDELINES

- A language service should be sensitive to and reflect the needs and lifestyles of the speakers of that language — including those of children, young people, urban and rural dwellers, and the elderly
- A language service should provide programming in genres such as news and information, children's/educational programmes, and entertainment
- Programmes should aim to reflect the realities of the target audience, while recognising their right to a wide range of programming from throughout South Africa and the world
- Programmes should aim to foster unity and common South Africanness.

NEWS AND INFORMATION PROGRAMMES

The SABC recognises the important part news and information programmes play in enabling every South African to participate effectively, and from an informed basis, in building our democracy, nation and economy. Meaningful access to information is therefore essential, and involves not only reporting events, but analysing issues of significance as well.

We commit ourselves to providing comprehensive radio news and information programmes in all the official languages.

BROADCASTING EVENTS OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

The SABC is committed to airing events of national importance, such as the annual State of the Nation Address at the Opening of Parliament, and the Budget Speech, that warrant full or extended live coverage. Coverage of these events gives South Africans access to important and relevant information about our developing nation. On such occasions the SABC strives to ensure that all its language services cover them. To this end, the language services collaborate with, and complement, one another's programmes and schedules. The Policy on News, Current Affairs and Information Programming gives more information on broadcasting events of national importance.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES

The Broadcasting Act requires the SABC to meet children's programming needs. Children require informative, educational and entertaining programmes of excellent quality, in their home language, aimed specifically at addressing their needs and instilling a sense of pride in their culture and language. These needs vary according to the circumstances and ages of children, from pre-school to schoolgoing and adolescence.

Radio programmes have a supportive role in nurturing and developing children's language capacity, and cultural knowledge and experiences. Programmes can also assist in promoting understanding between children of different language and cultural communities.

The SABC addresses the needs of children in its language radio services by offering programmes that cater specifically for them.

The Programming Policy give more information on children's programmes.

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

The SABC commits itself to ensuring fair allocation of financial and other resources to the language services so that they can meet the requirements of broadcasting programmes of excellent quality.

In allocating its resources, the SABC takes into account the historical imbalances between English and Afrikaans on one hand, and the nine African languages on the other. Moreover, the SABC takes into account that radio, owing to people's lower literacy levels and poverty, remains for many the only medium available for receiving essential education and information, and good quality entertainment. Special attention is therefore paid to developing and expanding programmes on services that target historically disadvantaged communities.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS


Through its Universal Service and Access Policy, which is described separately, the SABC ensures that its language services are accessible to South Africans who speak those languages.

TELEVISION

The SABC is committed to treating all the official languages equitably on television. This is achieved across the television portfolio as a whole, not on each individual channel. Over time, the SABC is committed to increasing the air-time of other official languages in local programming.

Since prime time (18:00-22:00) is relatively short, the SABC is committed to considering and implementing innovative strategies for providing programmes equitably in all the official languages. One such strategy being implemented is to schedule programmes in different languages on and across SABC television channels in a complementary way.





In fulfilling its mandate to provide television programmes in all the official languages, the SABC takes into account the following:

- The Constitutional requirement to treat all the official languages equitably
- The comparatively little television air time available, especially in prime time, and the complexities of allocating time equitably to all the languages
- The similarities and differences between the official languages; for example, certain languages are part of a cognate group (languages that are mutually understandable within that group)¹, others are not cognate but shared and understood by different communities², whereas some are neither mutually understandable nor widely spoken³. In addition, some language communities are much bigger than others
- The realisation that certain languages are recognised as being more marginalised than others (XiTsonga, TshiVenda, SisSwati and SiNdebele) and the additional responsibility this places on institutions such as the SABC to address this marginalisation
- The need to address historical underdevelopment of the vast majority of South Africans and their languages in order to realise the rights of all people to equality and dignity
- The unique potential of television to showcase cultures and languages creatively; to nurture people's knowledge and experience of one another, and to contribute to developing a national identity.

GUIDELINES FOR EQUITABLE TREATMENT

- The term equitable means just, fair and reasonable — not necessarily equal — treatment. In this regard, the SABC aims to broadcast every official language on television, while ensuring that programmes are accessible to as many viewers as possible. We aim to complement our national television service by providing regional services as required by the Broadcasting Act, (as amended) pending the licensing of these services by ICASA and appropriation of funds for this purpose, by Parliament
- Equitability is achieved through a combination of means, including unilingual productions and multilingual programmes. We strive to explore the use of technologies such as subtitling to ensure that programmes are accessible to as many viewers as possible. At times this objective is met the best by broadcasting in cognate or widely understood languages. When this is applied, the SABC rotates the use of languages in any cognate group in order to achieve equitability.

In striving to achieve equitability, the following matters are taken into account:

- The overall time allocated to each language
- Scheduling of programmes when members of the target audiences are available
- The range of programme genres available in each language
- Financial and other resources for programmes in each of the official languages.

In determining allocation of time to each language, the SABC has due regard to:

- The number of home language speakers in the coverage area of a channel
- The geographical spread of the language
- The extent to which members of a language community are able to understand other languages
- The extent of marginalisation of the language
- The extent to which it is understood by other South Africans
- Available resources.

These criteria are intended to ensure that all the languages receive some air time, but not necessarily in equal amounts. Moreover, when these criteria are applied effectively, we dedicate a greater amount of programme time to more widely spoken or shared languages, while committing ourselves to special projects for marginalised languages.

TELEVISION PROGRAMMING

For television programming, the SABC commits itself to the following principles:

- Across the television portfolio, the SABC aims to broadcast a range of top quality programmes in each of the official languages in order to meet the information, education and entertainment needs of audiences comprehensively
- The SABC aims to produce and screen news and information, children's educational programmes, and drama in different languages, while not neglecting other genres
- The SABC aims to ensure that programmes in specific languages are broadcast at times to suit most of the members of the target audience in that language community
- The SABC aims to broadcast programmes in the different languages that reflect the needs, lifestyles and circumstances of speakers of that language, including the children, young people, urban and rural dwellers, and the elderly
- Scheduling of programmes across the SABC channels should be sensitive to audiences' right to have access to a range of programmes in their home language, and in languages they understand. To this end, television programmes across the channels are scheduled in a complementary manner
- Programmes are aimed at fostering unity and a common South African identity, instead of separateness, and at promoting cross-cultural knowledge, appreciation and understanding. We believe our country's diverse language groups and regions should be reflected to the nation and to themselves
- The SABC creatively combines unilingual and multilingual programmes, and uses broadcasting technologies such as subtitling, to reach its language goals.

UNILINGUAL PROGRAMMES

The SABC ensures that across the television portfolio some programmes are dedicated to each official language. A programme would be classified as being in an official language if most of the programme were in that language.

MULTILINGUAL PROGRAMMES

The SABC is conscious of the part multilingual programmes can play in promoting knowledge and understanding of the country's diversity of languages and cultures. Such programmes, when used creatively, also reach out to wider audiences.

Accordingly, the SABC actively encourages production of meaningful multilingual programmes as a means of attaining its language broadcasting objectives. Multilingual programmes are those that include substantial amounts of more than one official language.

TELEVISION NEWS, CURRENT AFFAIRS AND INFORMATION PROGRAMMES

The SABC is specifically obligated to provide comprehensive news and information programmes. As stated previously, meaningful access to information involves not only reporting on events, but providing substantial analysis of issues surrounding such events. Accordingly, the following principles are applied to all the SABC news, current affairs and information programmes on television:

- The SABC screens television news bulletins in all the official languages, and is sensitive to audience availability in scheduling news programmes
- Given the constraints of channel air time, the SABC makes use of cognate languages, on a rotational basis, and widely understood languages to meet this mandate
- The SABC ensures that information programmes, including current affairs and documentaries, serve the needs of different language communities. In meeting this commitment, the SABC takes due cognisance of the fact that several languages are cognate to each other, or widely understood.





BROADCASTING EVENTS OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

The SABC is committed to broadcasting events of national importance that warrant full or extended live coverage, such as the annual State of the Nation address by the President at the opening of Parliament, and the Budget speech.

When such events are televised, the SABC strives to ensure that the broadcasts are accessible to the widest range of South African language communities. This can be achieved through use of a combination of cognate languages and widely understood languages, and innovative use of broadcasting technology such as multiple soundtracks, subtitling, and Sign language. In this regard, the SABC strives to broadcast events of national importance in the six language groups as provided for in the National Language Policy Framework, developed by the Department of Arts and Culture. The Policy on News, Current Affairs and Information Policy gives more information on broadcasting events of national importance.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES

Children require informative, educational and entertaining programming of excellent quality, in their home language, that is aimed specifically at addressing their needs and instilling a sense of pride in their culture and language. These needs vary according to the circumstances and ages of children, from pre-school to schoolgoing and adolescence. The SABC recognises that many children, particularly pre-school children, understand only their home language.

The SABC aims to broadcast a range of top quality educational, informative and entertaining television programmes for children of different age groups that are responsive to their language needs. This can be accomplished by means such as dubbing, multilingual programming and subtitling that is age appropriate. When acquiring and broadcasting children's programmes the SABC takes children's language requirements into account. More information on children's programmes is detailed in the Programming Policy.

DRAMA

Drama provides a unique means of telling our South African stories, and learning from and about one another. The SABC broadcasts top quality South African television dramas that in combination include and reflect South African languages and cultures. We also undertake to investigate innovative and creative ways of ensuring that such dramas are accessible to as wide a range of audiences as possible, such as multilingual productions, subtitling, and dubbing.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING, AND THE BLIND

The SABC is committed to responding to the broadcasting needs of all its audiences. Responding effectively to the needs of people with disabilities is an important part of our mandate. The SABC develops specific plans to facilitate access to its broadcasts for people with disabilities.

Broadcasting of programmes in South African Sign Language, as a recognised South African language, is one of the means of meeting the needs of people with hearing disabilities. While the broadcasting of Sign Language interpretation facilitates access to programming by the deaf and hard of hearing, it also creates knowledge and understanding of South Africa's substantial deaf and hard of hearing community, and so contributes to nation building.

The SABC progressively expands the amount of programming that is signed, beginning with selected news and current affairs, and events of national importance. Special efforts are being made to provide Sign Language interpretation when programmes are recorded in front of live audiences. Such efforts facilitate participation by people from the deaf and hard of hearing communities in such programmes.

While focusing on providing programming that is signed, the SABC also acknowledges that a holistic approach is needed to address the needs of the deaf community. In this regard, closed captioning may offer a viable solution. The SABC will continue to explore various technology options which may assist in providing a holistic approach in addressing the needs of the deaf community.

In meeting the broadcasting needs of South Africa's blind communities, the SABC undertakes to investigate the use of innovative technologies such as audio-description.

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

The SABC acknowledges that it is faced with limited air time and other broadcasting resources. In order to achieve its language broadcasting objectives, the SABC undertakes to achieve fair and equitable allocation of financial and other resources when commissioning and airing programmes in the official languages.

UNIVERSAL SERVICE AND ACCESS

The Broadcasting Act requires that, as circumstances permit, a range of programmes in South Africa's official languages should be extended to all South Africans. The SABC undertakes to pursue this objective with regard to television, through its Universal Service and Access Policy.

RESEARCH

The needs and demographics of our language communities are changing and evolving continually. Since the SABC is committed to serving the broadcasting needs of these communities, it undertakes to research these needs regularly, and to ensure that such research informs its programming and scheduling strategies. The SABC also makes use of research to assess whether the strategies and innovations it implements meet audience expectations adequately.

TECHNOLOGY

The SABC recognises that technology offers innovative means of meeting the challenges of broadcasting in the country's official languages and South African Sign Language. The SABC therefore commits itself to undertaking relevant research into the creative use of technologies to facilitate implementation of its mandate.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The SABC recognises that it has a significant part to play in contributing to equitable treatment of all the official languages and South African Sign Language. It believes it can fulfill its responsibilities effectively in collaboration with other organisations that have also been established to further these aims, such as the Pan South African Language Board. The SABC therefore establishes mutually beneficial working relationships with such organisations to facilitate compliance with the Language Policy outlined in this document.

MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION

This Language Policy lies at the core of our public service mandate as the public broadcasting service in South Africa. In order to ensure its implementation, the Board and management of the SABC have established specific appraisal and monitoring processes. The Board requires management to submit an annual language action plan that identifies future goals arising from this policy. A summary of achievements of the previous year is also to be attached to the language action plan in order to facilitate a review of the achievements, opportunities and challenges.

The summary includes the following:

- An account of the performance on language, including South African Sign Language, in the previous year
- A summary of the findings of any relevant research





- A summary of professional developmental programmes undertaken to meet the competence and skills needs of implementing this policy
- A summary of investigations into the use of technology, and application of technologies to implement this language policy.

The SABC also undertakes to publish relevant parts of this information as part of the Corporation's Annual Report to Parliament.

REVIEW

This policy is reviewed by the SABC Board every five years.

¹*Nguni and Sesotho languages are recognised as being cognate languages*

²*For example English and Afrikaans are not cognate but home language speakers of one often understand the other. In addition, these languages are understood by members of other language communities.*

³*For example, XiTsonga and TshiVenda*