The Illusion of Race Neutrality: 
Re-Thinking Poverty in Post-Apartheid South Africa

By Efeoghene Igor
Policy Brief

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Executive Summary

This brief will investigate the impact of linguistic inequalities on the development of democracy and social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa. Because language is an important tool used to access social, political and financial capital, it will be the main focus of my analysis. This brief strives to explain how the superiority of English and to a lesser extent Afrikaans has prevented the majority of South Africans from meaningfully participating in the public sphere. Although, the African National Congress (ANC)—the first democratically elected government—had ushered in a new era of tolerance, affirmative action policies have failed to incorporate the majority of black South Africans—broadly defined as “Africans,” “Coloureds”, and “Indians”—into the national landscape. As a result, this brief argues that affirmative action policies are ineffective. They rely heavily on racial categories to allocate material resources, which replicate the strategies developed by the apartheid regime to establish and maintain white hegemony. Further, this brief urges the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to support and fund multilingual programs in order to help the South African government achieve their goal of non-racialism—a political ideology that rejects the notion of race, rendering it inappropriate for use in public institutions (No Sizwe, 1979, 136).

1 This brief is prepared for the Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID) at McGill University as a part of the Research to Practice Graduate Student Fellowship in Development Studies funded by CIDA. I would like to thank ISID and CIDA for this opportunity. I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Jon Soske, to Dr. Philip Oxhorn, Founding Director of ISID, to Dr. Sonia Laszlo, Associate Director of ISID, and to Dr. Franque Grimard, for their encouragement and comments. The views herein do not necessarily reflect those of ISID or CIDA.


There are an estimated twenty-five languages spoken in South Africa—eleven of which are designated as official languages: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and English. The nine African languages officiated in 2003 under the National Language Policy Framework (NLPF) were chosen because more than 98% of the population uses one them as their home or first language (Conner, 2004; Kamwangamalu, 2001, 363) (see chart below). This policy brief focuses on the elevation of marginalized languages in public institutions—particularly in the education sector—in order to aid in the development of a strong South African democracy. The promotion of multilingual reforms will act as a symbolic gesture towards restitution and will also generate material benefits for the poor. These reforms will create incentives for the government to provide outlets for the poor to use African languages to access the state, i.e. increasing their connection with state institutions, which can ultimately help them increase their access to the social amenities (education and employment) required to improve their standard of living. Directing our resources at language planning will ensure that marginalized people feel represented by their government—increasing their confidence in their democracy. The main goal of this brief is to provide policy recommendations that will eliminate social stratifications that echo racial fault lines.
Policy Goals

1. Promote cultural and individual pride in traditionally marginalized communities.
2. Incorporate disenfranchised non-mainstream-language-speaking members of the population into the formal economy in order to encourage social equality.
3. Improve literacy in marginalized communities (with a focus on African languages) in order to increase living standards among the poor.

Significance of Issue

Multilingual reform is a necessary strategy to address the systematic exclusion of the vast majority of South Africans from participating in political discourse. Therefore, in order to move South Africa forward and towards a stable democracy, it is important that the legacy of apartheid be adequately addressed. The economy will continue to stagnate and unemployment will rise, which will lead to increased workers strikes, if invisible barriers continue to dictate access to reliable housing, an adequate standard of living and satisfactory educational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother Tongue Languages in South Africa</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>isiZulu</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IsiXhosa</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesotho sa Leboa</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setswana</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xitsonga</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>siSwati</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tsivenda</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>isiNdebele</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South African Census 2011
training. In order to contribute to the decolonization process it is imperative to create an inclusive language policy that finds strengthen in its diversity.

**Apartheid and Language**

The National Party implemented a detailed and restrictive policy of segregation when it came into power in 1948. In 1950, two key laws were passed: the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act. These laws required that all people living in South Africa be racially categorized as Europeans, Asiatics, Coloureds and Natives. Racial categories were not determined by phenotype alone—tribal distinctions were created based on language (Kamwangamalu, 2001, 361-2). Although, phenotype was used to determine who was “Coloured,” “Indian” and “White”, “Africans” were further divided along tribal lines in order to discredit the notion that there was an African majority. The architects of apartheid used linguistic diversity as the basis of their divide-and-rule strategy (Kamwangamalu, 2001, 362). However, in apartheid South Africa there was only two official languages—English and Afrikaans.

Apartheid was able to consolidate power for whites by combining indirect rule in the periphery with centralized despotism from the metropole (Mamdani, 1996, 101). The National Party argued from a eugenic basis that each racial group must develop separately within its own geopolitical borders (Dubow, 1987, 72). The government attempted to create sovereign homelands that would act as separate nations. However, unlike in typical sovereign states, there were no real security apparatuses (militarized border controls) to distinguish different residential areas. The National Party used indigenous networks and programs to subdue the historically constructed black population (“Africans,” “Indians” and “Coloureds”).

The apartheid government created an economy where wealth accumulation was restricted to whites, while blacks were used as the main suppliers of cheap labour (The Department of Trade and Industry, 6). Apartheid limited and restricted access to the economy, education and employment, and undermined opportunities for self-employment in black communities (The Department of Trade and Industry, 6). Educational institutions and curriculum during apartheid produced identities of inferiority and superiority (Soudien & Botsis, 2011, 89-90). Soudien and Botsis assert, “learners emerging from institutions in South Africa have to task of negotiating the intricate and often contradictory message of the transition from a racial, patriarchal, and class-divided society to one that is formally defined by inclusion” (Soudien & Botsis, 2011, 90). Language planning was a key tool in the colonial and imperial project, and as such it is important to
create strategies for development of inclusive public programs where all South Africans feel represented—this will increase national fervor and diminish racial cleavages.

Legacy of Apartheid

1) Access to material wealth and land is confined to a minority of South Africans (The Department of Trade and Industry, 4-6).
2) The majority of South Africans do not have the education or financial resources to fully participate in the formal economy (The Department of Trade and Industry, 4-6).
3) The majority of South Africans have limited access to the technical and scientific skills necessary to achieve a higher standard of living (The Department of Trade and Industry, 4-6).

Canada’s Interest

Due to Canada’s leading role as a stable multicultural and multilingual nation, it stands in a unique position to help South Africa. Canada’s language policies are great examples of how to support a diverse population. In addition, Canada has fought to secure the future of its youth and children by implementing educational policies that reflect the diversity of its students. The Canadian Languages Act aims to ensure that the quality of language proficiency of services provided and supported by the government is equal for both official languages, English and French. The government is committed to creating equal employment opportunities and advancement in federal institutions for Canadians in both official languages. The government is also dedicated to ensuring that the workforce of federal institutions reflects the linguistic composition of the population (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages).

CIDA will be particularly suited to assist South Africa in the process of creating a democratic and multicultural nation because they can transfer Canadian expertise on multilingualism and multiculturalism to South African lawmakers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Focusing on language planning will: a) improve the quality and sustainability of CIDA’s projects in South Africa, b) allow the development of effective measurement tools that reflect the real-life outcomes of CIDA’s assistance in the region, and c) contribute to the development of democratic practices in the region, one of CIDA’s priority themes. This policy brief also aims to assist CIDA in its effort to help the South African government to: 1) build the capacity of its public institutions; 2) strengthen its
democratic commitments to its people; and 3) increase access to quality education.

Policy Recommendations

- Promote print and electronic media projects in nine of the official (African) languages.
- Fund and promote research initiatives that are working towards standardizing African languages.
- Fund research initiatives that are working towards understanding the impact of language on poverty rates.
- Help design policies that mandate language training for senior level civil servants (i.e. ensuring public administrators are fluent in at least three of South Africa’s official languages).
- Fund research initiatives that are working towards the intellectualization of African languages, which will raise the self-esteem of African language speakers.
- Fund and support teacher education, with a specific focus on English language training.
- Promote the use of African languages as a subject in all schools at the elementary level.

Introduction

On Thursday August 16th 2012, South African police killed 34 protesters at Marikana, a platinum mine located in South Africa. The protestors demanded higher wages—the average worker earned the equivalent of $500 a month—and increased living standards (Magaziner & Jacobs, 2012). Images of Marikana protesters, singing and dancing whilst being confronted by armed police, were reminiscent of clashes between authorities and activists during apartheid. The strike was emblematic of many South Africans’ frustration with the slow-paced transformation that promised to bring economic mobility and social equality to black citizens in the post-apartheid era. Overcoming the legacy of apartheid has been difficult—strategies to stabilize the economy and extend basic services to the poor have been uneven and limited at best.

Daniel Magaziner, an Assistant Professor at Yale University, and Sean Jacobs, an Assistant Professor at the New School, in an op-ed piece for *The Atlantic* suggested that “the years since 1994 have demonstrated that poverty and inequality can be far wilier foes than white supremacy” (Magaziner & Jacobs,
Although the South African liberation movement has successfully overcome institutional racism, poverty and social inequality still persist. The Marikana protests suggests that the racist edifice of South African society remains intact, illustrating that many of the new policies—such as the Restitution of Land Rights Act, Employment Equity Act and Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act—that sought to create economic and social parity for non-whites did not effectively dismantle the apartheid machinery. Thus, it is imperative that development strategies promoted in South Africa address and interrogate the history of racism in order to create effective policy prescriptions that tackle poverty beyond affirmative action.4

Although Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies were put in place to address the legacy of apartheid and overcome economic disparities, they largely target middle-class black South Africans who already have access to the social and economic capital required to achieve a higher standard of living. Therefore, focusing on multilingual reform in government policies would be more effective in overcoming entrenched inequalities. Language will prove a better surrogate for change because many of the poor communities in South Africa do not fluently speak English—the language of the economy—which thereby presents a formidable barrier to participation in the formal economy. In addition, prioritizing language planning will encourage South African citizens to abandon racial classifications in their daily interactions. In the South African context, language does not have a racial connotation—which will allow South Africans to see themselves not as a specific group within a nation, but as a diverse population that make up a collective. Moreover, language will help target marginal communities without using race because, as English is usually associated with class, policies that promote other languages will be seen as a gesture to elevate the poor (as a class, instead of as a racial group).

Canadian support for multilingual reform will reinforce the South African government’s commitment to ensuring that South African children have access to safe and secure futures. Multilingual reform will promote human rights, encourage public-sector capacity building, and support conflict prevention efforts. In addition, it will help strengthen government institutions and democratic practices by de-legitimization of racial consciousness, allowing a national sentiment to take root. South Africans will no longer identify with their old apartheid racial groups—and because oppressed groups will feel as though the government is supporting them, they will buy into the social contract. Moreover, Marikana

4 I believe that affirmative action legislation, despite its intentions, often perpetuates racialist discourse and as a result increases incentives for ethnic chauvinism.
suggests that South African exceptionalism is a myth—like any other African nation, it is vulnerable to conflict despite being one of the most stable countries in the region.

The late Dr. Neville Edward Alexander—South Africa’s leading linguist and activist on the topic of multilingualism and language planning—believed that inclusive language planning would be an “organic affirmative action programme” (Alexander, 2011, 313-315). Alexander’s proposition will enable the current government to atone for grievances of the apartheid regime without adopting its racial script. Moreover, if the status of African languages is not elevated, historical racial politics and class conflicts will continue to resurface and inflame ethnic chauvinism (Igor, 2013, 35). Distribution of and access to material wealth, education, income, employment, and skills is dependent on one’s proficiency in English, and to a lesser extent Afrikaans, thus in order to level the playing field for historically oppressed communities it is important that marginalized languages are promoted in national discourse. Additionally, by funding research initiatives that aim to address the impact of language on poverty rates in South Africa, the government can work towards their goal to achieve non-racialism.

Extensive contemporary literature on South Africa tends to uncritically conflate race and class as one category, over-emphasizing the role of race and underplaying the role of class in its attempts to close the gap of economic disparities in post-apartheid South Africa. In order to promote positive policy changes that address the incessant poverty that plagues the nation, this brief suggests that focusing on language can provide access to education and employment, increasing opportunities for economic mobility while effectively addressing racism. Although this brief exclusively analyzes the South African case, the prescriptions advanced here can also be used to address poverty throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. With this in mind, this brief is a response to the following questions, which relate to CIDA’s priority theme to secure the futures of children and youth in developing nations: How can the South African government address the legacy of racism without relying on racial categories? And, how can multilingual reforms increase economic mobility and improve living standards?

The brief will articulate three policy goals: 1) promote cultural and individual pride in traditionally marginalized communities; 2) incorporate disenfranchised non-mainstream-language-speaking members of the population into the formal economy in order to encourage social equality; and 3) improve literacy in

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5 The government will not need to rely on the racial classification schema created by the apartheid government in order to address social injustices and racism.
marginalized communities (with a focus on African languages) in order to increase living standards among the poor. These specific goals focus on the need to increase the status of African languages in order to create incentives for South Africans to use African languages beyond the social sphere. These goals support the development of organic, grassroots and context-specific changes that will grant more South Africans access to the social capital required to build confidence in government programs, a marker of a strong democracy. The goals also support and assist with the aspirations of the landmark Constitution of 1996—the creation of a non-racial South Africa. In addition, this brief supports initiatives already implemented in the region by NGOs such as the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA). PRAESA is an independent research unit affiliated with the University of Cape Town (PRAESA). At PRAESA, the focuses on early childhood literacy and the intellectualization of African languages is meant to increase the self-esteem of African language speakers and create incentives for the government to support a multilingual population (PRAESA).

Dismantling the Apartheid Machinery Through Multilingual Reform

The Benefits of Multilingual Reforms

- Language planning breaks superficial cultural divides.
- The ability to make economic transactions in multiple languages will increase access to the formal economy.
- Multilingual reform will help South Africans disassociate race, language and culture.

One cannot deny the achievements of the post-apartheid government. There are many signs of progress: South Africa has successfully created a prominent black middle class who, Alexander suggests, “emerged out of virtual slavery and illiteracy [and who] occupy with great distinction the most responsible of jobs” (Alexander, 2013, 40). Additionally, South Africa is expanding its role as a regional transport hub; it is the biggest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, and South African banks are well situated to benefit from the expanding financial services throughout Africa (Lipton, 2013). However, the enduring legacies that maintain superficial divisions between communities have posed a real problem for continual progress. As Alexander poignantly exclaimed in his latest book, Thoughts on the New South Africa, “only an inveterate denialist or a fool will maintain that the new South Africa as a political and social entity is not currently facing one of its deepest crises” (Alexander, 2013, 39). South Africa has one of the world’s highest unemployment rates—it is currently at 25.2 percent (Statistics
employment is particularly low in the private sector (Lipton, 2013). 50% percent of young South Africans are unemployed (Lipton, 2013). The current economic situation is bleak: from 2010 to 2011 real GDP growth averaged at 3.3 percent, but then fell to 2.5 percent in 2012 (The World Bank, 2013).

In recent years South Africa has received a flow of capital from emerging markets throughout the world; the country is well suited for foreign direct investment. Its “financial openness” makes it desirable to global businesses (Lipton, 2013). However, South Africa’s “openness” can make it vulnerable to capital outflows, which will shift financing from local markets to competitive global alternatives. In addition, because of the rigidity in labour and product markets, low business confidence has resulted in limited private investment (Lipton, 2013). Thus, policy makers and economic managers in South Africa will need to maintain their cautious macroeconomic strategies in order to reduce unemployment and social inequality (Lipton, 2013). In order to unleash the capacity of the economy it is imperative that the South African government prioritizes multilingual reforms. Failure to address the structural problems inherited from apartheid will weaken the prospect of sustained and balanced growth inside of the country, and it will also have adverse effects on neighboring economies. The concerns put forth in this brief are palpable signs of the breakdown and vulnerability of South Africa’s social and economic structure.

**Policy Goal I: Promote cultural and individual pride in traditionally marginalized communities**

In order promote South African development through non-racialism, it is important to elevate the status of African languages to discredit the apartheid racial classification schema. To support this goal CIDA should: 1) promote print and electronic media projects in African languages; 2) help design policies that mandate language training for senior level civil servants (i.e. ensuring that public administrators are fluent in at least three of the eleven official languages); and 3) fund research initiatives that are working towards understanding the impact of language on poverty rates. By creating outlets for the use of African languages in mainstream South African culture, these languages will be used outside specific cultural communities. It will also increase the visibility of African languages nationally. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) already runs soap operas, which code switch within an episode in order to allow diverse audiences to view the same show at the same time. This creates unified treasured national symbols in popular culture and allows South Africans, despite
their language, to share in the same mainstream culture, which decreases barriers between communities. If there were more programing of this nature on a larger scale in mainstream media, it would help create incentives to learn African languages and also expose diverse audiences to different languages before a formal introduction at the primary school level. By promoting wide-scale print and electronic media projects there will also be a demand for diverse employees without focusing on race. By creating a space for multilingual dialogue there will no longer be a systemic denial of linguist human rights. In addition, the link between language and identity will, over time, lose its currency—people will be aware on a conscious and sub-conscious level of the constructed nature of identity.

Further, designing policies that encourage multilingualism in governmental institutions is integral in bolstering access to leadership roles for non-whites. In particular, public administrators should be fluent in at least three of the official languages. Enacting legislation that supports language training for senior officials will allow those who are not well versed in privileged languages admission into the system, ensuring that they can fully exercise their legal rights as citizens. In addition, it will create incentives for the use and promotion of African languages in public institutions. It could also act as the first step to inspire change in the private sector—business owners may hire diverse people as well as support the use of African languages in economic transactions. By making all domains of life—economic, social, and political—accessible through language reforms, many South Africans will feel ownership on a national, rather than local, level. The unwelcomed turn of events of the Marikana Massacre illustrate that, despite nineteen years of freedom, South Africa is restrained by the same problems. If left unaddressed, these problems will lead to civil unrest on a much larger scale. To create a pretext for non-racial development it is important that all official languages within South Africa are validated—not just symbolically but institutionally.

**Policy Goal II: Incorporate disenfranchised non-mainstream-language-speaking members of the population into the formal economy in order to encourage social equality**

Within the South African political terrain, language accessibility increases the democratic potential of the nation. Because the language hierarchy in South Africa mirrors historical racial and colonial power structures, it is imperative to focus policy reforms on multilingualism. This focus will address contemporary issues surrounding poverty and social inequality (Alexander, 2003, 5). The
languages in which major economic transactions take place act as the key to capital, political power, and social status (Alexander, 2003, 8). In order to overcome issues that divide the nation along racial fault lines CIDA should: 1) fund research initiatives that are working towards understanding the impact of language on poverty rates; 2) fund and promote research initiatives that are working towards standardizing African languages (standardizing languages is an effort to decrease discrepancies between regional dialects); and 3) fund research initiatives that are working towards the intellectualization of African languages, which will ensure that there is a vocabulary for Africans to use in their own mother tongue to participate in academic discourse. This strategy will elevate the status of African languages in the education sector. In addition, it will raise the self-esteem of African language speakers. It can be anticipated that the promotion of African languages within the school system will give students the incentive to communicate in their mother tongue outside of their communities. This will allow for a more visible presence of African languages in the public sphere, which will increase the visibility of blacks on a national level without using race as a referent.

By elevating the status of African languages—no longer privileging English and to a lesser extent Afrikaans—the majority of South Africans will feel represented on a national level. Increasing the status of African languages will promote the belief and value of democratic principles. In order to break the cycle of oppression that protects white privilege—even though one can no longer formally use one’s status as “white” to access material wealth—it is important to standardize African languages. Standardizing African languages will ensure that there are limited variations between similar dialects, which will diminish superficial barriers between communities (Alexander, 2003). Diverse language groups will most likely not view themselves as inherently different, which will contribute to the creation of a national ethos instead of strengthening ethnic divisions. Furthermore, these policy recommendations will close the gap that superficially determines group affiliation based on race. By supporting the development of African languages, speakers will have the vocabulary to access higher paying jobs, which will in turn increase the standard of living for most poor South Africans.

In an article entitled “South African Economic Update: Financial Inclusion Critical for South Africa’s Poor,” The World Bank identified some key areas for South Africa to improve the standard of living of its poor. Although, their focus is on financial inclusion and banking infrastructure, promoting and financing multilingual programs will strengthen their analyses of the current state of
economic disparities in contemporary South Africa. As mentioned earlier, multilingualism will help ensure that the majority of South Africans gain access to jobs with equitable pay and quality education in the short and medium term. Despite South Africa’s developed financial sector, there are twelve million South African adults without bank accounts and many more with limited access to financial services (The World Bank, 2013). In order for South Africans to harness and leverage existing opportunities in their country, it is essential that aid be directed at agencies like PRAESA, as mentioned above, because of their focus on alternative educational structures that enable students to gain the language skills required to participate in the public domain.

The World Bank suggests that there are “challenges in financial inclusion, particularly the highly uneven access to and use of financial services and the concentrated ownership structure of the banking sector” (The World Bank, 2013). Although the ANC has remained in power, the private sector still lacks diversity. In order to unlock South Africa’s economic potential and encourage political stability, it is important to address the long shadow of apartheid ideologies that stunt the development of a non-racial ethos. Moreover, language planning can be harnessed to increase the advantages of having a developed economy.

**Policy Goal III: Improve literacy in marginalized communities in order to increase living standards among the poor**

This policy brief is deeply embedded in previous debates surrounding affirmative action in the university admission process. In April 2010, *Pretoria News* published an article by Dr. Max Price, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, entitled “Is There a Place for ‘Race’ in a University Selection Policy?”. Price suggested that a race-based policy could reinforce paternalistic relationships between cultural groups within South Africa. In addition, he suggested that it was detrimental to the self-esteem and confidence of black students (Price, 2010). Price argued that variations in academic performance are the product of one’s educational training, socioeconomic status, and familial support. Nevertheless, Price insisted that race was a good proxy for poverty because of South Africa’s peculiar history under apartheid. He argued that poverty and inequality manifested through racial cleavages, and that in order to effectively address poverty and social inequality, affirmative action policies should remain in place (Price, 2010).

Price’s understanding of the sociopolitical climate reflects the normative liberal sentiment in South Africa (Igor, 2013, 44). In response to this thinking, Alexander
posed that “by making concessions to race thinking, for example, by putting it in little squares with racial labels to be checked on application forms for the alleged purpose of tracking the tempo of "transformation", we are establishing or consolidating the template of a genocidal grid, one that is all too real in the consciousness of those who are so labelled and categorised” (Alexander, 2010). This debate accurately depicts the issue surrounding racial classification schemas in governmentally approved initiatives. As mentioned above, this brief would like to support and aid South Africa in the development of non-racial policies via the promotion of multilingual reforms. Therefore, making concessions to racial thinking will not lead to transformation; instead it will sustain the neo-apartheid orthodoxy, even if unintended.

In an interview with South African poet, activist, and educator Ms. Karen Press, she suggested that the use of skin colour as a measure of material inequality is insufficient. Press posited that affirmative action was only for “political expediency,” which has the unintended consequence of entrenching unchanging understandings of racial knowledge (Press, 2013). Multilingualism can help historicize as well as overtly address the legacy of apartheid racism; it will help make South Africans become aware of the state’s priority to compensate for and address legacies of racism by recognizing the multiple languages used by the non-white population. Additionally, multilingual reform will allow public officials to avoid using racial categories to grant black citizens access to jobs and admission into universities. As pointed out earlier, affirmative action policies usually reach those that already have access to the social capital required to benefit from preferential procurement reforms, which does not apply to the majority of marginalized South Africans. Therefore, language would act as a sufficient proxy to deliver these benefits.

Creating policies that target literacy in African languages will improve the status of poor South Africans. By focusing on literacy in African languages at the elementary level, students will have the proficiency required to adequately engage in the public sphere, which will create incentives for the use of such languages in official discourse. By improving the general proficiency of students in African languages, it will increase the cultural value of speakers of these languages, which may translate into economic benefits in the future. A failure to deliver inclusive growth will weaken prospects and hamper efforts to establish a non-racial nation. In order to achieve social cohesion CIDA should: 1) promote the use of African languages as a subject in all schools (private and public) at the elementary level; and 2) fund and support teacher education, with a specific focus on English language training. According to the 2011 census report, only 8.2
percent of the population uses English as their mother tongue, however, the
majority of South Africans use it as a second language (Louise van NierKerk, 2013). In order to increase the standard of living for poor students in the short-
term, it is important that their teachers have an adequate proficiency in English.
The aim of this brief in not to eliminate the use of English, but rather to increase
the value of African languages in the public domain. Therefore, students should
obtain an adequate proficiency in English in order to participate in the national,
as well as global economy. These recommendations will serve as an impetus to
create a non-racial ethos in South Africa.

Increasing incentives to learn African languages while providing poor students
with adequate English training will create more opportunities for poor students to
improve their economic and social status. These policy recommendations will
create the space to implement programs that target poor South Africans, most of
whom happen to be black, without focusing on their old racial classifications,
moving South Africans towards a non-racial future. Additionally, by providing
quality education to teachers, poor students will receive important English-
language training that will enable them to successfully interact with their fellow
citizens in the public sphere. Although, the overall aim of this brief is to support
multilingualism in South Africa, it is important to ensure that students in the
interim (short to medium term) will acquire the language skills needed to get a job
and support their families, in order to avoid class conflicts. These policy
recommendations will ensure that students have exposure to Standard English (a
requirement to pass high school matriculation tests), which will determine access
to universities and potential jobs. The promotion of English is not meant to
overshadow the overall aim of the brief, because, after all, English is one of the
official languages; it is rather to ensure that students have the adequate
language skills to participate in the public domain.

Conclusion

As Patrick Lawrence observes, “racial epithets and racist ideology may be
suppressed in a show of political correctness, but race consciousness lurks
beneath the surface, impending the birth of a common patriotism and
threatening, once again, to divide the nascent nation” (Alexander, 2001, 471). It
is commonplace to reject “race” and racial thinking in contemporary South
African society; nevertheless race is used to describe a set of historical
experiences (Igor, 2013, 41). Therefore, we must not underestimate the
transformative power of multilingual reform. The reforms put forth in this brief will
contribute to the sustained and balanced growth of democratic principles, which
will allow government bureaucrats to create indicators that can effectively measure social cohesion in the public domain. By using mother tongue languages to identify people it will allow public administrators to examine how new policies are impacting development in communities previously marginalized under apartheid rule. Fortunately, those that were often stigmatized by the apartheid regime often spoke African languages; therefore it will act as an effective proxy to measure development in particular communities, which will allow officials to redress racism of the past while contributing to the establishment of a non-racial future. This brief aims to support South Africa in its goal to achieve non-racialism by advocating for policies that encourage diversity.

Annotated Bibliography

Alexander’s book provides context for the current poverty crisis in South Africa. While acknowledging the achievement of the post-apartheid government, Alexander suggested that multilingual reform would aid in the development of a non-racial nation.


Jacobs and Magaziner’s article provides a detailed account of the Marikana strike. Additionally, it suggests that South Africa’s problems are not specific to South Africa; instead the strike was the result of growing tensions in the global economy.


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