

**Guest Speaker at the Domboshaba Festival –
September 28, 2013
Theme: Ikalanga First**

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I am more than delighted to be a part of the Domboshaba Cultural festival, an event I have long desired to witness. I must apologise for not honouring several invitations from the organisers of this event. An event to develop, promote and nurture the culture of the Great People of the North, the Bakalanga. I now praise the Lord for providing this rare opportunity to be together.

The theme for this year's festival is Ikalanga First. Ikalanga is the language and the culture of the Bakalanga. The language in which the majority of the people in the Northeast are socialised and express their culture. Before, independence, literature indicates that Ikalanga was taught in schools but was abolished through a directive in 1972. It has been many years since Bakalanga and other ethnic groups have made a plea to the government of Botswana to see the urgent need to incorporate mother tongue into the curriculum as medium of instruction. The call for mother tongue education has not only been found necessary by the marginalised groups but other professional and governmental and international agencies.

1. In 1985 – the German Foundation conducted a study and established the need for bilingual education in schools, especially in areas where Setswana was not a first language.
2. In 1988 – the same foundation offered assistance to establish bilingual education in these same areas. The offer was turned down on the premise that we all speak Setswana.
3. The National Commission on Education in 1976 also established this need;
4. The 1993 National Commission on Education also established the need for use of local languages in pre-primary and primary schools. This Commission made recommendations which were rejected in the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education.
5. In 2005 the UN Special Rapporteur on Education visited Botswana and observed that the Education system needs a model which incorporates the languages and cultures of children so that they feel accepted and develop high self esteem - for nation building.
6. The UN periodic review process in 2008 and 2013 continued to urge Botswana to use mother tongue in education.
7. Several motions have been tabled in Parliament including one by Former MP – Chilume;
8. UNESCO views mother tongue education as an indicator of quality education, at early levels.

The marginalised groups have maintained that the decision to marginalise their languages is a violation of fundamental human rights and amounts to discrimination and inconsistent with the democratic principles we purport to cherish as a nation. The value of mother tongue education is well documented and there is no longer a debate on this matter. For the sake of completeness, I would mention just a few advantages just so that we are all on the same page as to why you should put Ikalanga first. We are to bear in mind that mother tongue education is a determinant of academic achievement because:

1. It helps students to make a transition from home to school as it reduces anxiety;
2. It helps students to participate in the learning process as their language, cultural experiences are incorporated in the learning process.
3. It prevents rote learning in which students have no skills in the language of the classroom, to communicate and debate concepts- for greater comprehension;
4. It facilitates student centre-learning and makes parents to participate in the learning process for their children. When children learn in a language that is different from their home language, the parents become strangers to the learning process.
5. When children talk about their culture and home experiences in their language, they learn to put it in writing much quicker, and develop reading skills much better. What they are able to talk about due to its familiarity from home, they are able to write it down and read it;
6. When children have developed their linguistic skills in mother tongue, they are able to learn a second language much faster and better. If we find no other reason to use mother tongue, let us use it for the sake of learning Setswana and English better.
7. When children in multilingual classrooms are able to hear other languages and cultures, they are able to develop tolerance for difference which is good for nation building.
8. When children learn in their language they develop high self-esteem – one of the determinants of academic achievement.
9. Professor Dell Hymes summarizes the value of bil/multilingual education as 'it is just good for education'. Educational failure is actually linguistic failure – inability to express oneself in a learning process, or to comprehend what is being communicated in a learning process.

10. An education system in which everyone feels respected and a part of, facilitates true nation building.

You are therefore putting Ikalanga first for good and legitimate reasons, which many nations in the World have embraced.

Now that there has been a calling for mother tongue education since independence and the response has been consistently in the negative, what should be the way forward? Should we give up?. What I know is that this issue has been a concern not just to the Bakalanga people but to all marginalised groups. It seems therefore, that there is need for concerted effort and cooperation.

- We need to continue to be patient but not as patients but active participants in this course. We need to find time to come together and develop strategies to continue putting more pressure in peaceful but effective ways.
- I suggest that a committee from as many marginalised groups as possible be formed to come up with such strategies.
- I believe that awareness raising at the community levels is important, and the need to hold regular seminars, debates and workshops should be explored.
- A biennial conference on this matter would continue to raise awareness.
- Applying for community radio stations and constant reminders, and follow ups should be part of this continued advocacy.
- Informal teaching of these languages to out of school children should be started in communities.
- The Committee suggested above, should make regular visits to the Office of the President to appeal for a paradigm shift.
- Individual efforts to write and publish in these languages should be continued.
- Follow up on recommendations from the UN UPR process should be made, and made part of awareness raising;

The effects of not using Ikalanga in education are obvious and they include: Loss of cultural expressions - making the language less developed and becoming endangered. In a democracy, peoples' voices are to be listened to. It has been 47 years, these voices have been turned on and never turned off. What is required is to raise the volume and use our democratic rights to achieve our goals. Divorcing our democratic rights from the achievement of our aspirations is one of the challenges which has lengthened our journey. Other challenges include self-censorship and individualism. Awareness raising becomes critical in this respect. I subscribe to the idea that true peace is not just the absence of war, but the extent to which each one finds themselves reflected, accepted and appreciated on the national mirror. We need to pray for our nation that we may find a better model of building a nation and achieving unity other than assimilation. We need divine intervention to heal our nation- we need a national agenda for true nation building and find true peace. An agenda we cannot let go, because it is too dear to ignore. Putting Ikalanga first is putting yourself first. Your language is you. The rejection of your language is a rejection of you. Love yourself and put yourself first, because if you do not, no one will.

My husband and I are more than excited to be here today, and we look forward to enjoying ourselves all day. I wish you a joyous occasion, and most importantly, that you may continue to find ways of addressing this eyesore in our nation.

Nda kumbiiri, Nda boka - Thank you