

Media Release

20 February 2020

For Immediate Release:

SAASTA celebrates International Mother Language Day

The South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) is joining the world to celebrate International Mother Language Day on 21 February by profiling science in all nine official languages on various platforms, including social media.

The International Mother Language Day is a worldwide annual celebration intended to encourage nations to give importance to their mother language and cultural diversity, along with different dialects that preserve the diverse cultures found around the world.

This year marks the 19th anniversary of the International Mother Language Day, which is an initiative that originated in Bangladesh. The initiative was approved in 1999 by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at its General Conference and has been celebrated throughout the world ever since.

UNESCO, a key player in trying to preserve indigenous heritage around the world, seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture.

SAASTA, a business unit of the National Research Foundation, with the mandate to advance public awareness, appreciation and engagement of science, engineering and technology in South Africa, recognises the importance of promoting science communication and awareness in all nine official languages, through various science competitions and its Youth Science and Technology Journalism (YSTJ) programme. In 2019, it celebrated the International Year of Indigenous Language through its Young Science Communicators Competition's inclusion of a category for indigenous languages.

In its efforts to ensure that previously disadvantaged communities are included in the overall mandate to advance awareness, appreciation and engagement of science, NRF-SAASTA has established the YSTJ Programme. The programme was established in 2016 to facilitate the communication of sciences and technology in indigenous languages through community media.

Since its inception, the YSTJ programme has grown in leaps and bounds and has been impactful in celebrating the importance of the diverse indigenous languages in science communication. It covers all nine provinces in South Africa and has made inroads into underrepresented rural areas across the country.

Through its collaboration with the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) and community media across the country, the programme has played a crucial role in producing content and communicating science in various indigenous languages. The media coverage generated by the programme was produced in 11 South African official languages.

Mr Zamuxolo Matiwana, Media Coordinator at SAASTA and responsible for managing the programme, said the YSTJ programme has been successful in science communication in indigenous languages in South Africa, despite challenges of limited scientific vocabulary in indigenous languages. He sees a great opportunity for the development of indigenous languages to prevent them from dying out in the future.

Matiwana, who is a keen advocate for the democratisation of science through communicating it in indigenous languages, believes that indigenous languages should be celebrated and used as a tool to make science and technology more inclusive.

Matiwana believes that in a developing country like South Africa, where about 25% of our population is illiterate, it is important to transform science communication and make it inclusive.

Last year the programme produced 1 171 media items including 830 science and technology focused stories, 340 general stories with 93% of them in indigenous languages and 7% in English and Afrikaans.

Ends

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ABOUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENT (SAASTA)

SAASTA is a business unit of the National Research Foundation (NRF) with the mandate to advance public awareness, appreciation and engagement of science, engineering and technology in South Africa.

It aims to be the leading science advancement agency in the country by promoting and communicating the value and impact of science, technology and innovation in a dynamic knowledge economy. It also intends to contribute significantly towards building a science, engineering and technology (SET) human resource base. For more information on the operations and programmes within the NRF please visit www.saasta.ac.za

ABOUT THE NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION (NRF):

The National Research Foundation (NRF) was established on 1 April 1999 as an independent statutory body in accordance with the National Research Foundation Act. The NRF is a key public entity responsible for supporting the development of human resources for research and innovation in all fields of science and technology. The organisation is one of the major players in educating and training a new generation of scientists able to deal with South African and African needs. The organisation encourages public awareness and appreciation of science, engineering and technology, and facilitates dialogue between science and society. Its vision is to contribute to a prosperous South Africa based on a knowledge economy. For more information on the operations and programs within the NRF please visit www.nrf.ac.za