



Reclaiming the rocks: ukuthetha ngezifundo zomhlaba ngesiXhosa

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South Africa has an exceptionally rich geological heritage, including tourist attractions such as Table Mountain and the Cradle of Humankind, as well as important economic deposits, such as gold, diamonds, coal, and Platinum-Group-metals. South Africa also has a rich cultural and linguistic heritage. Our people are known for their resilience, born from our uncomfortable and ugly past – apartheid. Although apartheid came to an end in 1994, its impact remains visible today, with widespread poverty, inequality, poor education, violence and corruption. English, despite only being a first language for 8% of the population, dominates scientific discourse in South Africa. This is partly a result of apartheid, whose aim was to exclude the majority of non-white South Africans from the scientific community. Given the poor education system, many South Africans, despite holding a grade 12 qualification, still struggle with the language, particularly at varsity level. IsiXhosa is the mother tongue of over 8 million people, and is mutually intelligible with Zulu, Northern Ndebele and Southern Ndebele, meaning it is potentially accessible to 23 million people. Classroom studies have demonstrated that people engage more and understand better when the conversation is in their native tongue¹⁻³

Despite the fact that South Africa is an exporter of many geological resources, and the intertwined history of mining with the black community, geology remains inaccessible to most people. South Africans, and Africans in general, are big storytellers - stories about the constellations, the moon, and the universe as a whole. This project, *Reclaiming the rocks: ukuthetha ngezifundo zomhlaba ngesiXhosa*, is an open invitation to invite all South Africans to share in their rich geological history through storytelling. It is a statement that science, like music, knows no language. We have summarized the most compelling stories about South Africa's geological history, translated them into isiXhosa, and host them on an open access website (chosindabazomhlaba.com), and on YouTube. Recently, we started a school drive, reading these stories to school children. This project has had an impact on the lives of many people, whether they spoke isiXhosa or not, geologists or not. Next, we plan to write a children's book and expand the school drive. Our ultimate goal is to develop a Geological encyclopedia written in isiXhosa and the other South African languages.

¹Benson, (2004) The importance of mother tongue-based schooling for educational quality. Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, The Quality Imperative, UNESCO, Paris

²King, K and Mackey, A (2007) The bilingual edge: Why, when, and how to teach your child a second language. New York: Collins.

³Salili, F and Tsui, A (2005) 'The effects of medium of instruction on students' motivation and learning', in Hoosain, R and Salili, F (eds) *Language in multicultural education* (Series: Research in Multicultural Education and International Perspectives) 135-156. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.