# MISA Zimbabwe 2nd IG Conference

## Localising access in Zimbabwe

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"If we seek to empower a community, then we must be aware that nothing reaches them as effectively as words in their native language. So, if you want them to use mobile phones and the internet, if you want technologies to have the impact it has everywhere else in the world, then give it to them in a language and context that they can relate to."

## Analysis on localisation of the internet and mobile based applications in Zimbabwe

*Internet penetration and internet usage in Zimbabwe*

a) ITU Estimates (2016)          23.12% (percentage of individuals using the internet)
b) POTRAZ report (March 2017)    49% (internet penetration rate)

- 67% of youth (15-24 years) are using the Internet
- Zimbabwe falls in the 20-40% category
- Nearly 9 out of 10 young people not using the internet live in Africa or Asia and the Pacific

*Mobile penetration mobile usage*

POTRAZ report (March 2017)       94.5% (95/100 people with active mobile lines)

Despite the fact that our penetration rates are so high, smartphones are not nearly as common as dumb phones and feature phones.

| Internet usage (what the internet is used for) | Mobile phone usage (what are mobile phones used for) |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>Mobile money transactions</li><li>WhatsApp- voice and messaging</li><li>Facebook</li><li>Twitter</li></ul> | <ul><li>Mobile money transactions</li><li>Voice calls</li><li>SMS</li><li>WhatsApp</li><li>Facebook</li><li>Twitter</li></ul> |

**Policy**

- **National Policy for Information and Communications Technology (2016)**
- **ZimAsset**

Both speak to ICT Infrastructure, Governance but do not make specific mention of capacity building and development of localised resources across sectors in Zimbabwe. There is no mention of development of language for the neither the disabled community nor people who speak, read and write languages other than English.

## Politics of localization of the internet/information

There was frosty diplomatic relations between the country and Western countries between the periods of 2000-2004/6, when the push for land reform was at its peak. Professor Jonathan Moyo, the then Minster of Information and Media made efforts to encourage localized content. The policy around 75% local music content comes to mind.
For some scholars, however, the notion of 'Zimbabwean culture' and 'national identity' projected by the government was 'exclusive' and 'selective' rather than inclusive (Chiumbu 2004: 32
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261575535_Between_Globalisation_And_Localisation_Contradictory_Impacts_of_the_Seventy-Five_Per_Cent_Local_Content_on_the_Music_Industry_in_Zimbabwe [accessed Sep 20, 2017].

## Language

The dominant language found in the bulk of our local resources and information is English. Where there are resources in vernacular languages, its dominantly Shona and Ndebele, and mostly offline. Most government platforms have their resources in English. Zimbabwe has 16 different languages but the business and education language is English. Not much effort has been made to make resources available in a format usable by the disabled community.

## Dominance of some languages over others

Chinese, French, English, Portuguese; Japanese are more dominant, easily acceptable languages of communication the world over for business and education.

In Zimbabwe, the dominant languages are English, Shona and Ndebele, but this is not reflected online.

## Thoughts about localisation so far:

**Google, Facebook translations**- Localisation in the online space stopped at some point. The most widely known effort to translate was the Google search engine, however, the dynamic nature of technology means we have fallen behind. Terms such as Encryption; Connected; Tether; Bluetooth; WiFi do not have translation Facebook translation platform?? Is this legitimate or a form of malware or an open source application?

**Languages spoken on platforms Facebook vs. Twitter-** you find that there are groups of people that will communicate on these platforms in English and some that better express themselves in vernacular. Indication of a need for platforms to be contextualised and made relevant to various groups of people, some groups have indicated that platforms such as Twitter is elitist, my thoughts are it's a failure to comprehend and understand how the platform works as they are not intuitive enough to adapt to varying groups of people.

**Majority languages vs. Minority languages**- The fact that there are some languages used over other languages means that cultures and values of people with the minority language runs the risk of being eradicated as it is used less and less.

**Language development**- There needs to be efforts for the government to recognise that education and access to information are fundamental human rights and these can be achieved by ensuring that resources are available in all languages spoken in that country. This will serve to give people are more wholesome experience of the internet.

**Proprietary vs. Open source/ FOSS**- most platforms available for translation tend to be Free and Open source tools to encourage usability of the application and relevance to users across language and contextual divides.

**School curriculum and Language usage in schools**- Language usage in schools is repressive on vernacular languages outside of the language classes. Most material is in English.

**Under-utilization of devices**- devices tend to either become obsolete due to lack of capacity or are under-utilized because the language and context of those apps is not relevant to the users within that country. Smartphones and device use will never be as impactful dominant languages are targeted to dynamic geographic, demographic and psychographic target markets.

## What are the challenges and opportunities that localisation will and can bring to Zimbabwe?

**Opportunities**

- To have government policy that is pro-vernacular
- To create a Language development body- passed into existence by law which will enable access to users and create a different but wholesome experience of the Internet.
- Job creation and collaboration between Linguists; University; Tech community and experts across the sector to avail, provide context of resources that need to be translated.
- Piggy backing on existing popular platforms
- To boost access to information to communities that face language impediment- results in coming up of new innovative individuals, empowerment of communities.
- Preservation of culture and values that lie within languages and their contexts.

**Challenges**

**Availability of resources-** in middle to low income countries for development of information and resources in vernacular languages.

**Limitation of tech subjects**- The challenge of teaching technical subjects in native languages

**Dialects-** Shona has a number of dialects which would make it difficult to translate from English to Shona or put strain on resources.

**Modifying the school curriculum**- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has already begun to roll out learning of STEM subjects inclusive of Maths; Computers and Science in local languages. However, there are limits to what can be taught given the current state of language development. Subjects such as Math have a limit to how you can describe terms that have been traditionally described in English.

**Ease of doing business**- issue of minority vs. majority languages

**Anglicization of language**- part of the mainstreamed language has been affected by the dominant use of English.

**Mainstreaming of language that has been developed**- resources may affected how well the languages will make it into mainstream and be used on a daily basis.