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UCT PhD candidate appointed to PanSALB board to champion multilingualism



Naledi Maponopono

Photo: supplied

The University of Cape Town's (UCT) PhD candidate Naledi Maponopono has been appointed by the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Gayton McKenzie, as a board member of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB). This five-year appointment underscores Maponopono's unwavering commitment to the advancement of indigenous African languages and the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa.

Maponopono, who has been part of the UCT academic community since 2011, has dedicated her scholarly journey to studying African languages and literatures. She holds a Bachelor of Social Science degree, majoring in Public Policy and Administration, Sociology, and isiXhosa

Language and Literature Studies, and an honours and master's degree in African Languages and Literatures. She recently submitted her PhD for examination at UCT, reinforcing her role as a thought leader in language studies.

"This appointment is a testament to my lifelong commitment to advancing indigenous African languages. From the time I started my academic career, it was my goal to serve on this board eventually," said Maqonono. "I have always dreamed of playing a central role in shaping the linguistic landscape of our country, both through research and policy influence. PanSALB is a powerful instrument in our democracy, designed to safeguard our languages, and I am honoured to contribute."

Born and raised in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, before moving to Westlake following the tragic loss of her father, Maqonono's journey is one of resilience and determination. She attended Westerford High School on a scholarship from the Kay Mason Foundation. She has since dedicated her career to education and language development as a teacher and lecturer at various levels.

In the appointment letter, McKenzie said Maqonono's new role on the PanSALB board requires her to provide oversight and strategic direction, ensuring that the board fulfils its constitutional mandate of promoting and developing previously marginalised official languages, sign language as well as Xhosa, Nama and San languages. "She is expected to serve impartially and independently, and exercise, carry out and perform her powers, duties and functions in good faith and without fear, favour, bias or prejudice, subject only to the Constitution and the Act."

Maqonono added: "Language is a powerful tool for unity. As the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests, 'language shapes our worldview.' Each time we learn a new language, we step into someone else's world and experience their perspective. In a country like South Africa, with a history of racial injustice, language can be an instrument to bring people together. I want to be remembered as a board member who used language to unite South Africans under a common purpose of making our country prosper."

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