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BAQONDE
Learn in Your Language

PRESS RELEASE.

KICK-OFF ON A NEW PROJECT

New Erasmus+ Capacity Building Project:

**BAQONDE (“Boosting the Use of African Languages in Education. A Qualified Organized
Nationwide Development Strategy for South Africa”)**

BAQONDE is a collaborative capacity-building project which sets out to promote the use of indigenous African languages in Higher Education in South Africa. The key aim is to provide access to the use of African languages, thus enabling all university students to reach their full potential. The three-year project is co-financed by the European Union.

The word ‘baqonde’ means ‘(let them) understand’ in the Nguni languages of South Africa. As acronym for the project, BAQONDE is a rallying cry for all to join hands in responding to inequalities in the educational system which frequently see students who are home-language speakers of African languages being left behind.

The majority of South African students in the primary, secondary and tertiary education system are home-language speakers of languages other than English. Yet, apart from Afrikaans, indigenous African languages are still not widely used as mediums of instruction. Research has underlined the negative impact that this situation can have on students’ performance. The vision of South Africa’s national education authorities is to address this problem by encouraging the development and use of African languages as mediums of education, but this goal has been set back by concerns of staffing, training, infrastructure, among others.

However, recent approval of the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions in South Africa now requires the development of indigenous African languages as medium of instruction and as languages of higher academic discourse, and highlights the critical role of universities in developing indigenous African languages. Within this policy context, BAQONDE provides an effective response to these priorities. The project consortium will establish a new and effective inter-institutional network of African Language Development Units (ALDUs), as well as provide training, develop materials and contribute to benchmarks and standards for multilingual teaching in Higher Education.

Mr. M. Mabizela, Chief Director, University Education Policy and Support at South Africa’s National Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) comments: “Undoubtedly, the BAQONDE project with its aim to facilitate and promote the use of indigenous African languages as mediums of instruction at HE institutions in South Africa advances the objectives of the *Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions*. The BAQONDE project is leading us on the path towards the restoration of dignity and parity of esteem for our indigenous languages, and that is

commendable indeed. This is very encouraging indeed and is the kind of enthusiastic response we hope can be emulated by other institutions.”

The project is situated in the Language Directorate at NWU and is co-led by the director, Mr Johan Blaauw. He is assisted by Prof Rosemary Wildsmith-Cromarty, who represents the NWU on the Quality Assurance Committee and the Dissemination Committee and which are part of the administration of the project. At NWU, the Baqonde team will work closely with the School of Language Education in the Faculty of Education. The latter is also hosting the new Centre for African Language Teaching (CALT) for Setswana, so there will be synergy between the Centre and the Project. In addition, the Faculty of Education is responsible for the design and implementation of the Short Learning Programme in Multilingual Pedagogies which fits well with the training component of the BAQONDE project. SADiLAR, through the person of Prof Langa Khumalo, is also affiliated to the project.

Prof Wildsmith-Cromarty is delighted to share news of the launch of the project in South Africa, especially as NWU is one of the lead universities in the project, together with the University of Salamanca, Spain: “We are delighted to bring our expertise in multilingualism, translation and interpreting to bear in this important area. We look forward to working with our European and South African partners in contributing to the growth of the African languages in Higher Education, especially through materials development and training programmes in multilingual pedagogies.

The BAQONDE project is a collaboration between seven European and South African Higher Education Institutions: University of Salamanca (Spain), North-West University, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Rhodes University, University of Groningen (Netherlands), Trinity College Dublin (Ireland) and University of Western Cape. Project website: <https://baqonde.usal.es>

Contact for press and journalists: rosemary.cromarty@nwu.ac.za

Main Project Website:	https://baqonde.usal.es
Local Partner website	www.nwu.ac.za
E-mail:	rosemary.cromarty@nwu.ac.za
Telephone:	+27 72 636 4137