COUNTRY REPORT

SOUTH AFRICA

REPORT TO THE 6TH ICEB’S GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2016)

# INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period from ICEB’s mid-term Assembly that took place in 2014 to date. It is during this term where South Africa saw a change in leadership of SABA, wherein I was elected president and Mr De klerk vice president (See South Africa’s country report 2012-2014).

# ACTIVITIES

SABA had the following activities profiling its work:

## Meetings

Due to the high costs borne by members attending general assemblies, the 2014 October meeting took a decision to only have one meeting per year, instead of two. This was put to use from 2015. Furthermore, another change on meetings is that instead of one-and-a-half day’s general assembly, it was decided in the 2015 meeting that in order to encourage members to attend the full meeting, we have to expand them to two full days for the general assembly and the following day to be used for the Executive meeting. This decision was put in place in 2016 General Assembly.

During this period, the following meetings with stakeholders or external parties were held:

* Meeting with Edit Micro – 2014 – In this meeting, the Advocacy Committee of SABA discussed the use of Apex by learners.
* On the 2nd of March the President, together with members from the SANCB and Section27 met with the Minister for Social Development, in which meeting braille training and delaying in textbook production were discussed. This followed the SANCB’s response from the presidency in which we were, as Council’s education committee, advised to meet with the DSD.
* On the 1st of April we met with the Minister for Basic Education at the LTSM Round Table Talk. In this meeting, Mr de Klerk, representing Blind SA, Ms Donaldson, representing the Council and Mr Netshituni, representing SABA, made their voice heard during this event. Issues around braille were again raised and assurances by the Minister given.
* On 17 April Mr de Klerk, Miss Donaldson, Miss Lebogang Manyane and Mr Ntshavheni Netshituni met with Mr Palime from the Department of Social Development to discuss about the establishment of SABA as a statutory body and identifying stakeholders involved in the process. In this meeting we agreed that Mr Netshituni will send Mr Palime the Constitution, statement on disability and the joint statement released in 2014 regarding the use of Apexes as tools to augment studies for the learners.
* On November 24, SABA hosted a “Stakeholder Meeting” which sought to encourage various departments to take individual responsibilities in ensuring that the Authority exists in accordance with some legislation. It was just unfortunate that only one out of the five identified Departments attended, namely the Department of Arts and Culture. This is the department South African braille users are proud of because of their involvement in braille matters, hence their funding for the attendance of the 6th ICEB General Assembly by SABA’s president.
* On 17 February 2016, delegation including SABA, Blind SA and Council met with the officials from the Department of Arts and Culture, where the Lindandanda delayed report was discussed. The report deals mainly with braille production in the country and, it is in this meeting where the director promised the delegates that the report will be serving before parliament’s portfolio committee in four to five months’ time. We are still going to track progress here.
* On 24 March 2016 SABA delegation met with the Department of Social Development with a view to rekindle talks around the Authority’s legal status. This gave rise to a need for a formal communication to the Director-General of the DSD, requesting him to nominate an official who will strictly deal with SABA matters and assist in the crafting of way forward.

## Braille Cup Competition

The South African Council for the Blind, Blind SA and SABA, led by Perkins international, facilitated the hosting of the first ever Braille Cup Competition. This competition was held on the 14th of August 2015, with six schools participating. The success of this competition inspired everyone to call for more of these competition, with the other one planned for 2016.

## Engagements with Section27

Blind SA, SABA and the South African Council for the Blind initiated talks with Section27 about the delays or non-committal by the Department of Basic Education to facilitate the production of braille textbooks to blind learners. This process led to the research conducted by Section27, the compilation of findings flowing from this research and, consequently, the launching of the report “Left in the Dark” in November 2015. On the 8th of March 2016, the group of delegates from these organisations met with the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee responsible for Education to discuss the impact of the report and possible actions. The group will keep a close watch on the developments.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE

In the quest to firmly solidify the implementation of the Unified English Braille Code (UEB), a decision was taken in 2014 to issue a decree pronouncing on the deadline for all institutions by which they should have fully implemented the UBC. This decree was issued in July 2014 and a subsequent reminder circulated in December same year. In plans, SABA had put aside a period of two-and-a-half years to monitor the implementation of the code. It is however still going to be a challenging task since we still have to get institutions who will fund the project.

## TRAINING

From 2014, the department of Basic Education in provinces undertook to conduct training on three phases of braille, namely:

* Grade 1 braille;
* Grade 2 braille; and
* Technical braille.

This training was offered to teachers from schools that accommodate learners with vision impairment. To this moment, beneficiaries to this training were – North-west Province, Free State Province, Eastern Cape Province. We are still waiting for other provinces to make calls for this training to be offered.

In order for this training to be achieved, three members were identified, namely: Mr Christo de Klerk, Mr Deena Moodley and Miss Tracy Smith. We are working with Blind SA in order for this training to be accredited.

## SUB-COMMITTEE WORK

The Authority formed a Quality Committee in 2012 to look into all matters relating to quality production of braille materials. This committee has been so much involved in its work and had made several proposals to the Executive for implementation. The committee reports to the General Assembly and its report is accordingly scrutinized by the delegates.

## BRAILLE EXAMINATIONS

For many years the South African Library for the Blind (SALB) coordinated the braille examinations which were divided in the three categories, namely: I. Elementary; II. Higher; and III. Transcriber’s braille Examinations. The SALB reviewed their coordination of these examinations and decided not to continue with them from 2016. This then propelled the Authority to look for another institution who can coordinate and Pioneer School volunteered. The Braille Exam Committee is busy putting together the structure of the coordination.

## CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Without having to particularly focus on specific clauses of the constitution, the Authority, through the guidance of its Legal committee, had amended its Constitution on three occasions, in 2013, 2014 and May 2015. These amendments were aimed at, among other reasons, closing down lacunae that existed, unwittingly making the constitution prone to both misunderstandings and possible abuse.

## 6TH ICEB GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The South African delegation to the 6th ICEB General Assembly which will be held in Baltimore comprises:

* Mrs Pasha Alden: She is currently a braille consultant at the South African Library for the Blind and served as a consultancy for Braille South Africa which later transformed to SABA, where she continued with this work. She is a dedicated and committed braille user and had developed or worked with teams that developed braille manuals in other South African languages. She worked as a braille examinations moderator and assessor for many years.
* Mr Ntshavheni Netshituni: He worked as a braille proofreader at Blind SA for over four years and went on to do the same job at the University of South Africa from 2008. He served in various structures of Braille SA and served as the first vice President of SABA from 2012 to 2014, where he was elected president. He participated in structures that re-worked the contractions of Tshivenda and Xitsonga braille.

# CONCLUSION

The South African Braille Authority is currently instrumental in the forerunning of the implementation of braille in the country and is keeping close relations with other neighbouring countries like Botswana, who, as always, will be attending our General Assembly. The president had started making enquiries about the need for the UEB in other countries like Mozambique. Our idea is to see the use of UEB applied in as many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa as possible.

Thank you

Ntshavheni Netshituni

President (SABA)