

The North West Province Hosts Oral History Colloquium

By Thato Matshidiso

As the COVID-19 Pandemic reshapes human interaction, the national Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC), in partnership with the Provincial Arts, Culture, Sport and Recreation (ACSR) and the Oral History Association of South Africa (OHASA) held a virtual National Oral History Colloquium in Rustenburg last week.

The event was held under the theme: “The future of Oral History Traditions/Histories in times of technological revolution and pandemic in society”. Among the participants were Oral History practitioners, Archivists and speakers from South Africa and abroad, delivering papers virtually.

Promoting oral tradition and oral history is relevant in addressing the imbalances of the past and therefore contribute to the National Development Plan goal of “transforming society and uniting the country”.

The President of Oral History Association Professor Sekgothe Mokgoatsana said: “We appreciate the efforts by the state to create an enabling environment. The state has given us the right to use our languages. When we ignore the right to use our languages that are in the constitution, we are failing ourselves and our future generations.”

Professor Mokhoatsana added that the DSAC is mandated by Cabinet to lead the National Oral history programme for South Africa. The programme seeks to yield information that will be added to the country’s archival holdings.

“The programme further seeks to assist communities in retrieving neglected indigenous and community knowledge to promote social, economic and cultural development.

“It is important to consider the majority of South Africa in recording our stories. We have not done enough and we have a great work ahead of us.”

MEC for ACSR, Mme Galebekwe Tlhapi, said: “It is important that we are of the National Oral History colloquium. We need to remember where we come from. Our stories are not being told as much as they should be. As the Department we need to make sure that these stories are told by us, not any other person.

”We are here to also make sure that people know their history. This oral history is important today, since it has often been mainly Westerners who have been telling our story. It is important that we tell those stories ourselves.”

Professor Phillipe Denis from the University of Kwazulu Natal spoke on the topic: “Can oral history help healing the wounds of the past?”

“The topic speaks about us as a people, healing from the emotional wounds, not physical. Trauma takes time to heal. We need to heal collectively as a country since we were all wounded by the injustices of the past.”

“The person that is wounded must speak out and tell the truth. We all need to create a relationship with the wounded. It will help them open up, but the healing process cannot be rushed.”

Dr Abraham Serote from National Department of Arts and Culture, spoke about social cohesion and nation-building, in the era of COVID-19 pandemic.

“The strategic intervention of the department is to promote oral history. Social cohesion is the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression among individuals and communities.”

Nation-building is the process where a society with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions comes together within boundaries of a sovereign state.

“We need to engage all sectors of society to ensure that social cohesion and nation-building become.”

Dr Jajendran Govender who is OHASA’s Executive Director & Social Cohesion Advocate was speaking on the relevance of orality studies.

“It is important that people learn the different cultures of communities across the country. He added that we need to record cultural songs, dances and food types.”

“South African community is becoming more and more vocal in the expression of culture and tradition. They are no longer accepting outsiders to dictate how their culture and tradition must be practiced. Africa is becoming more aware of itself” further said Dr Govendor

Dr Govendor said that the introduction Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) at university level increased the appreciation of culture and tradition by black people. IKS can do so much to widen our knowledge of humanity.