



# Language issues for safeguarding

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**DRC**  
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TWB's research shows that a language sensitive response to Ebola outbreaks could improve understanding and trust in key messages. It will enhance the accessibility of RCCE and AAP mechanisms, including the reporting of SEAH and support to survivors. Learning from the outbreak in DRC, TWB would recommend the following actions.

## Language data

Identify the most effective languages, formats, and channels for communicating on difficult concepts. Language data should be considered as a standard component of response planning everywhere - alongside data on age, gender and disability.

### Services offered by TWB:

- Support in the integration of **language data** in regular data collection and [multi sectoral needs assessments \(MSNA\)](#)

## Visualizing language data

Language maps and basic language and communication guidance built from existing data and assessments can be excellent tools for all partners to plan their communication strategy and can be used response-wide.

### Services offered by TWB:

- Development of **language mapping** of languages spoken in affected areas.
- Development of **infographics and guidance** on preferred languages, formats and channels in affected areas.

## Terminology

Investigate sensitive terms and how they are used and understood. Use agreed terms consistently. The research shows significant linguistic barriers to effective communication. This highlights the need for further investigation into appropriate terms to allow common experiences and values to be recognised and developed in tackling SEA. Terms identified in the research for further investigation would include those around sexual violence against men and boys, stigma, shame, unequal power, breaking promises, 'respectable people', purity, confidentiality, and sisterly solidarity. These concepts explored during the research, as well as others, need to be either harnessed to speak to peoples lived experiences of exploitation and abuse. To do this they need to be expressed in familiar ways. The research will need to go beyond language and dialect to examine how different demographic groups may use the terms differently. Understanding what stigma, weight, or gender terms carry, and what they are really understood to be describing, will allow responders to words that best describe the concepts they want to convey. Different words may be needed for different demographics (e.g. adolescents and older people). Once established, it is important to use terms consistently to avoid misunderstanding. A shared glossary can be a useful tool for this.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Qualitative research** on understanding of key concepts around SEA in affected communities, coded terminology employed by communities to communicate SEA, development of recommendations for appropriate communication of concepts across different demographics.
- Development of **guidance and glossary tools** on terminology related to SEA in local languages.
- **Terminology testing** of terms in local languages with communities to ensure terms are understood and are appropriate for different demographics and contexts.
- **Training** on language in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse for PSEA focal points and responders

## Informed recruitment of staff

Staff at the front line of communicating directly with communities, interpreters, and translators should all be recruited with an eye to reflecting the variety of language needs of the communities they serve.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Assessment of language** needs of affected communities.
- Development of a **network of translators and language professionals** in local languages to support humanitarian responses.

## Test language, understanding and communication preferences

Testing the language comprehension of an affected population is the best way to determine which languages to use; often people underestimate or overestimate their comprehension of a language when asked.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Comprehension testing** of **risk communication materials** with affected communities
- **Comprehension testing** of **languages spoken** including local and national languages to understand level of understanding in affected communities.

## Use the local languages for all oral or written risk communication on safeguarding.

It is essential that stakeholders prioritize communication in these languages, to ensure that affected people understand key messages.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Translation** of community-facing risk communications in local languages.
- **Audio recording** of messages for risk communication to ensure access to people of all literacy levels.
- **Testing** of messaging and risk communication with affected populations.

## Information materials

Develop information materials in plain language and with reference to local understanding of the concepts. Explain concepts using familiar words and a clear sentence structure. Avoid technical jargon and words that are not commonly used. It is important to ensure that the content is field tested, accurate, in context and appropriate and that it addresses the main concerns of communities. Where a concept is understood differently locally than it is internationally, test and agree on other terms, phrases and examples that build on local understanding, or clarify your definition.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Training** on drafting plain language information materials
- **Translation and plain language editing** of community-facing risk communications.

## Localize translation of national languages.

Understand where the French used in DRC uses grammar, sentence structure, and words borrowed from local, other national, and foreign languages.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Consultation** with language services professionals to understand localised versions of national languages.
- Development of **language style guides and factsheets** for those translating and drafting community-facing information materials.

## Best formats and channels for communication strategies.

Test preferences for written, audio, audiovisual, and visual formats. Gather data on how people routinely get access to information and preferred channels making sure to be able to break this down by gender.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Research** with affected communities to understand preferences.
- Support in the integration of **language data** including preferred contents and formats in regular data collection and [multi sectoral needs assessments \(MSNA\)](#)
- **Development of audio-visual content** for use across different channels of communication including videos, audio recordings, graphics and information design.
- Translation of materials and recordings for **radio** including scripts and jingles.

## Strengthening reporting mechanisms

Create reporting mechanisms that are accessible to those who speak marginalized languages or are less literate. Disaggregate use by language to see who is left out. Make sure that people can give feedback or report SEA in the language they are most comfortable in, and that they know this. Gather language disaggregated data on reporting and feedback mechanisms to understand if people from all language groups are using the service proportionately. Address under-reporting from a particular language community with further research to understand additional barriers, linguistic or otherwise.

### Services offered by TWB:

- Support in **data collection** to understand strengths and weaknesses of existing mechanisms.
- **Assessment** of language capacity in existing reporting mechanisms including translation chains and access for speakers of marginalised languages.
- **Recommendations and consultation** on improvements to existing reporting mechanism and development of new reporting mechanisms.
- **Training** of staff working with reporting mechanisms on SEA and language.

## Investigations and survivor support services

Make sure investigations and survivor support services are available in the appropriate language for the survivor. Use reporting and referral mechanisms to identify the primary language of the survivor. Reflect this preference during contact with the survivor during investigations.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Assessment** of language capacity of investigation teams.

- **Language mapping of survivor support services** to make sure a referral can be made to sites where the survivor's language is spoken, or that appropriate interpretation is available.

## Interpretation

Invest in developing interpreter skills for the safeguarding sector. Train interpreters in best practice in discussing SEAH. Build an understanding of the appropriate register for different audiences, the need to make people feel comfortable by reflecting their language use, and the agreed terminology for the sector. Make sure they are trained in ethics and confidentiality as well as interpretation skills.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Training** for interpreters on Humanitarian Interpretation
- Development of **guidance** on interpretation and cultural mediation in PSEA in humanitarian contexts.

## Closing the feedback loop

Close the feedback loop in the right languages. The research identified that there was very low confidence in justice systems, and that extended to that of humanitarian organisations. It will be crucial to demonstrate action and close the feedback loop using the appropriate language and terms so that those making reports can see that action has been taken.

### Services offered by TWB:

- **Translation and plain language editing** of responses, clarification and follow-up to communities.
- Development of **written, audio and visual materials** for responding to communities.

## Resources and examples

Language tips for effective humanitarian data collection  
([English version](#), [French version](#))

Language maps  
([Overview](#), [DRC Ebola crisis language maps](#))

Multilingual glossaries  
([Overview](#), [DRC health glossary](#))

How to talk about Ebola. Language guide for health communicators (DRC)  
([English version](#), [French version](#))

Terminology in health interventions. Communicating difficult concepts in DRC requires linguistic awareness and practical tools  
([English version](#), [French version](#))

The Language Factor. Lessons for the 11th Ebola outbreak on adapting to the language needs of communities learned during the 10th Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo  
([English version](#), [French version](#))

We need to talk. Effective Ebola risk communication requires respect and transparency and remains as vital as ever  
Full research report ([English version](#), [French version](#))  
Findings brief ([English version](#), [French version](#))

Missing the mark? People in eastern DRC need information on Ebola in a language they understand  
Full research report ([English version](#), [French version](#))  
Findings brief ([English version](#), [French version](#))

Field guide to humanitarian interpreting and cultural mediation  
([English version](#), [French version](#))

Training of public health intervention teams  
([English version](#), [French version](#))

[PSEA key messages in 100+ languages](#) including French and Fula/Fulfulde

Multilingual [Film introducing PSEA](#) for newly engaged staff / contractors inc. Fula and French

A [series of audio podcasts](#) introducing PSEA & GBV for frontline staff, casual labourers, volunteers including in [Fula](#)

An [example of guidance for talking about gender](#) from the Rohingya response