

# LANGUAGE IS LIFE

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## Translators Without Borders

**ANNUAL REPORT**

January 2019 -  
December 2019



**TRANSLATORS**  
WITHOUT BORDERS



# Educación

# Υγεία

# Ulinzi dhidi ya unyonyaji wa kijinsia na unyanyasaji

# সুরক্ষা

# Cioclón

These multilingual words represent just a small selection of the work TWB did this year, and the issues we responded to, with your help:

**Education. Health. Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse. Safety. Cyclone.**

Words have a greater meaning when they are in the language we know best. And language is more than words. It represents our sense of self, community, identity, connection, aspirations, and ability to express our most basic human needs. 2019 saw demand for TWB's work and leadership around language in more places than ever—in documents that guide humanitarian policy, in the freezing winters of the northeastern United States, in media stories, in new partnerships with global nonprofits, and, as always, in the passion of our community.

This momentum, recognition, and your support helped us use language to respond to global crises in new and innovative ways.

We conducted unique language and communication research in places like Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). We joined global consortiums to share how language can address the efficacy of education, and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. We worked with our community of linguists in new ways, offering professional development and incentive programs, evolving our translation platform, and running exciting contests. We advocated for and provided services like plain language support, pictorial communications, and audio messaging, better serving less-literate people globally. And our work garnered broader public recognition in influential media like *The Lancet*, *Forbes*, and *Devex*.

TWB's innovations have helped us reach and affect the lives of many, helping them keep themselves informed, healthy, safe, and better able to share their own thoughts and needs.

As we write this in 2020, it's impossible not to reflect on how the work that we did in 2019 prepared us to respond to the global COVID-19 pandemic this year. Your support helped us build the systems, tools, technology, partnerships, and credibility that allowed us to quickly and effectively respond to the global need for COVID-19 information and communications, in many languages. Your support has an exponential impact, allowing us to build and develop tools that are critically needed now, and will impact people's lives for many years.

We could not have done this without the support of our donors, our sponsors, our translators, and our partners. In other words, we could not have done this without you. You helped build a world where knowledge knows no language barriers.

Thank you, and please enjoy reflecting on the words and that work that you helped us accomplish in the following pages.

*Merci.* Thank you.

Aimee Ansari, Executive Director and Andrew Bredenkamp, Board Chair.

# Impact



TWB delivers language solutions in the right language and format, to make sure everyone can give and receive information in their language. This helps humanitarian responders and people affected by crisis or poverty to communicate more effectively.

## In 2019, we achieved a lot:



**We supported 150 partner organizations worldwide**, including global partnerships with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and InterAction.

**We trained 2,261 people in 13 cities in 3 countries** on how best to incorporate language considerations into their humanitarian and development programs.

We established an advisory board to oversee Gamayun, TWB's language equality initiative. This board will oversee TWB's language technology development, laying the ground for amplified impact thanks to the efficiency and scalable nature of language technology for marginalized languages.

We advocated for language support when planning education and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. We translated the principles against sexual exploitation and abuse into 100 languages, also working with InterAction to create a plain-language video in multiple languages to further prevent abuse in the aid sector. And we joined the Global Education Cluster, which cited language as the first barrier to national advocates participating in meaningful education coordination groups.

**“I think that  
the nuanced and  
considered voice  
TWB brings to the  
humanitarian space  
is vital, and in relation  
to technology your  
approach could not  
be more significant.”**

Luke Stannard, Senior Education  
Technology Advisor,  
Save the Children Norway

*“Partnership,” in French*



partenariat

# Community

Our amazing community of language specialists continues to demonstrate tenacity and dedication to TWB's vision—a world where knowledge knows no language barriers. Every word translated by our linguists can affect a life, and we are grateful for these professionals who drive our innovative work.

## Our community grew tremendously:

**Over 800 new translators** joined our community every month, with a to-date record of **981 signups** in September 2019.

In 2019, our community worked in over **140 language pairs**, from Amharic to Zulu, enabling us to reach vulnerable people.

Our community translated **over 18 million** life-changing words in 2019.



## We engaged with our community of linguists in new ways:

We established a new community recognition program for six languages to better address the challenges faced by translators working in hard-to-source languages.

We ran our first translation contests.

We established the “Language Associate” position in our community for speakers of French, Spanish, Kurdish Sorani, Kurdish Kurmanji, Tigrinya, Amharic, Somali, Dari, and Arabic. These associates represent the translator community of the language they speak, and help with community engagement and recruitment.



**“We are hugely grateful to Translators without Borders for the BRILLIANT work on translating for Think Equal. I have just landed in Kwa Zulu Natal where I’m about to train 60 teachers to deliver the first South African pilot programme - translated into Zulu by TWB! Thank you for helping us change the world!”**

Leslee Udwin, Founder and Executive Chair, Think Equal

*“Dedication,” in Zulu*

A woman with dark hair, wearing a red patterned dress and large earrings, is shown in profile, looking intently at a laptop screen. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery and buildings. The overall mood is focused and professional.

**Ukuzinikela**

# On-the-ground Language Solutions

## Partnerships & Programs

Our nonprofit partners help us respond to crises, build our community of translators, develop innovative humanitarian programs, and deploy new language technology. They work directly with people affected by crises or poverty, integrating our language solutions and translations into their programming, so that everyone can give and receive information in a language they understand. Most importantly, through their support, they help us grow and advocate for global understanding of the importance of language.

Expanding our network of partners is critical.



In 2019, we developed new, strategic partnerships, both globally and for country-specific humanitarian programs. We were on the ground researching and responding directly to crises in five countries—Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Mozambique.

### Our partnerships and programs have amplified the words and language tools we create:

- We partnered with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Bangladesh, creating a health-focused glossary with more than 200 multilingual terms.
- We worked with the Humanitarian to Humanitarian Fund (H2H) for the first time, deploying a language-focused team to Mozambique following Cyclone Idai and Cyclone Kenneth.
- We established a team in the Democratic Republic of Congo to conduct research around communication preferences and needs and to build new on-the-ground partnerships with organizations like the International Rescue Committee (IRC).
- Globally, we worked closely with the Network for Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) to translate the PSEA principles into over 100 languages, and develop a multilingual, plain-language video to educate humanitarian staff.
- We revamped our nonprofit partnership program to focus less on word count, and more on true partnership and collaboration.

In a crisis, the ability to respond and communicate in new and creative ways, in the right language, can mean the difference between safety and fear, confusion and understanding, independence and autonomy. Our partnership approach ensures the right words reach people when they need them.

"I am deeply touched by the story and the great work of TWB. [TWB's work in Mozambique] might only be a short story but it carries such an essential message: **That communication is a basic need that can help to save and protect lives.**"

Editor, TC World

*"Story," in Portuguese*

# História



# On-the-ground Language Solutions

## Language data and evidence

People working with communities need detailed information about peoples' language and communication needs. This includes data about the languages, formats, and communication channels that people prefer. But often, this data does not exist. Through our research, data, evidence, and mapping programs, we provide the tools humanitarian responders need to best communicate with people affected by crisis.



### Language-focused research, evidence, and data help drive better solutions and programming:

In March 2019, we released a rapid language needs assessment based on the research we conducted in Goma, DRC. The report examined the importance of communicating about Ebola in a language and format people can understand. This research informed on-the-ground programming. It also helped us advocate for the need to consider language when communicating about health needs and vaccines. The report was headline news in [Devex](#), the leading international development media outlet, and was also cited in [The Lancet](#), one of the world's most-respected medical journals.

We partnered with University College London (UCL) to develop and distribute language maps for 15 countries. These maps help humanitarian responders understand which languages are spoken, and where, so they can better plan multi-lingual communications.

Our data-driven language maps following Cyclone Idai and Cyclone Kenneth in Mozambique were included in the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) official response update, a well-respected resource for humanitarians.



**“Translators without Borders provided our assessment team with an invaluable translation service. It allowed us to undertake the assessment in the local language of Shona, something which enhanced both the accuracy and credibility of the data. Not only did it improve data quality, but it also demonstrated respect for community culture and language, something that was not lost on the community.”**

Ian Dawes, Head of Mission, Goal Response Team - Cyclone Idai



# Kuṅṅororā

*“Assessment,” in Shona*

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# Innovation



Innovation is more than a buzzword. Innovation drives connection, better multilingual information, and more effective humanitarian communication.

As our on-the-ground programs continued to grow, we conducted unique cross-border research. We broadened our communication focus to include more pictorial and audio communication, to help those who are less literate. And we continued to test, build, and grow our language technology leadership and use cases.



## A desire to innovate for good drove our work in 2019:

- Our research has highlighted that audio and pictorial communication is an important part of communicating with less-literate people. In 2019, we developed innovative ways to include these findings in humanitarian programming, by establishing a recording studio in Nigeria, developing pictorial and multilingual signage for Rohingya refugee camps, and more.
- We expanded Gamayun, TWB's Language Equality Initiative, developing new voice- and text-focused language tech solutions with funding from the Cisco Foundation and Microsoft Philanthropies.
- TWB conducted a ground-breaking language-focused assessment across the border of Bangladesh and Myanmar.

This was the first language-focused assessment to focus on the communication needs and preferences of refugees and host communities, across a complex border.

- We signed a contract with the Global Education Cluster to lead on global discussions around how language can present a barrier to education.

- The Lancet, one of the world's leading medical journals, cited TWB's innovative research on communication needs around Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo, helping more people consider the importance of language in public health.

“Thanks for your  
fascinating report!  
Sounds amazing and  
ground-breaking  
(you guys are  
shattering old ideas  
in a way that I  
absolutely love).”

Jenny McAvoy, InterAction

“Ideas,” in Myanmar

ဝိတ်ကားများ

# Organizational Capacity



In 2019 we scaled our operations significantly. We developed policies, processes, and systems to support that growth.

We are especially proud of how we:

- Collaborated and bonded at our team meeting in Barcelona in February;
- Grew our lively and collaborative internal team culture, while renewing a focus on self-care;
- Improved internal accounting and reporting mechanisms, implementing new tools and processes;
- Were the first nonprofit organization featured on the “Nonprofit Remote” podcast;
- Increased our translation capacity by improving our online translation platform and establishing new roles and recognition programs for our community;
- Improved our data-management systems so we can track our operations and make more objective decisions, particularly for translation and financial management;
- Established a new country-based program in Mozambique;
- Refreshed our visual branding and brand collateral;
- Expanded our diverse global team. In 2019, TWB staff lived in approximately 30 countries, and were 60% women.

**"Your services allow us  
to reach thousands of  
people with important  
translated information  
that makes a real  
difference in  
people's lives."**

- USAHello

*"Team," in Catalan*

# Equip

# Financials

In 2019, TWB increased core reserves and expanded our income sources.

We grew our financial stability through new global strategic partnerships, earned income from nonprofit partners, new sponsors, and through the generosity of individual and in-kind donors.

## Your ongoing support makes a difference:

Please support us personally or through your company at [translatorswithoutborders.org/donate](https://translatorswithoutborders.org/donate)

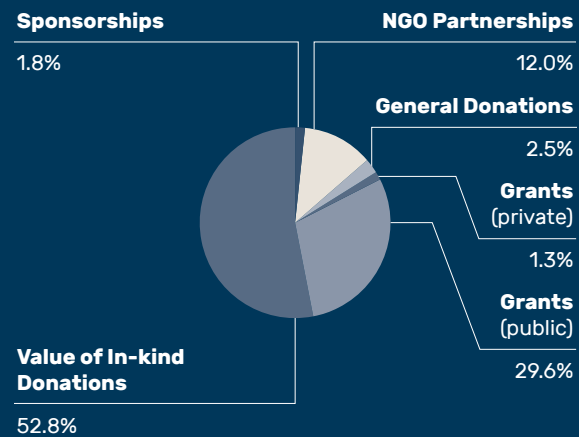
Many of our donors use their wills or living trusts to make their most generous gifts. Please remember TWB when you create yours.

From our April 1, 2018–December 31, 2018 reporting period to 2019, we increased our financial stability (these figures are adjusted to reflect the length of the reporting period):

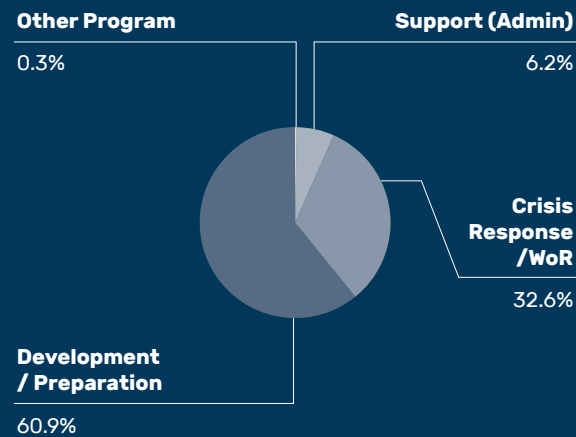
- Earned income from NGO partnerships increased by 36%. It now represents 25.5% of our overall income.
- Grant revenue increased by 67%, income from individual donors increased by 18%, and sponsor income increased by 55%.
- The generous support of our sponsors and donors allowed us to respond to international crises in new and language-driven ways.



## Income & Expenditure (including in-kind donations)

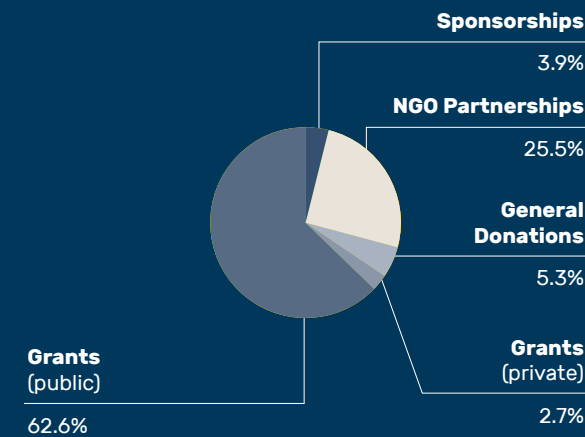


FY19 Income with in-kind donations

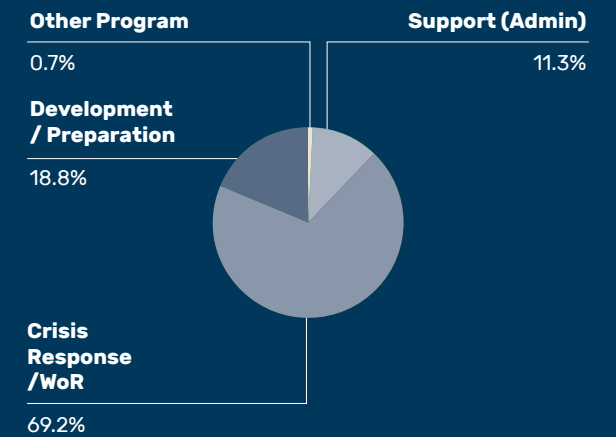


FY19 Expenses with in-kind donations

## Income & Expenditure (without in-kind donations)



FY19 Income without in-kind donations



FY19 Expenses without in-kind donations



**TWB is committed to adhering to relevant codes and standards of good practice, including:**

- UN Global Compact
- Principles of Digital Development
- TAUS Dynamic Quality Framework
- Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief
- Common Humanitarian Standard
- DFID Supply Partner Code of Conduct

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