Why language inclusion matters for effective climate action

The climate crisis is the world's most urgent sustainability challenge - yet those most affected are often the least able to speak out. As the climate crisis worsens, we need solutions created by and for people most at risk.

Approximately 3.3-3.6 billion people[1] live in hotspots of high climate vulnerability across Africa, South Asia, South and Central America, and small island states. **All are highly multilingual contexts.**

The three countries facing the highest risk from natural disasters [2] all speak **hundreds of languages** - the Philippines uses over 120 languages, Indonesia 800, and India 123 major languages plus hundreds more minority languages.

Eighty percent of people displaced by climate events are women, who are significantly more likely to experience **language and communication barriers in disasters.**
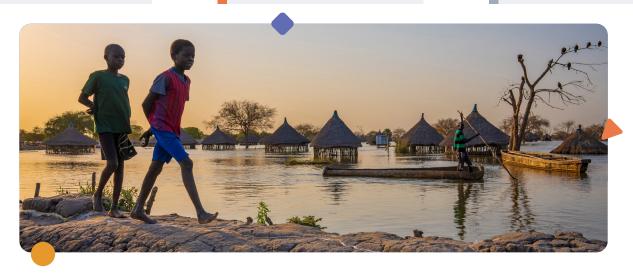
[1] IPCC 2022,
https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/
[2] World Risk Report 2023,
https://reliefweb.int/report/world/worldriskreport-2023-disaster-risk-and-diversity

- People need trusted, relevant information to make informed decisions before and during disasters. Anticipatory approaches need to be inclusive and tailored to the most impacted. **But many of those most vulnerable to climate change are also the most likely to be excluded through language** - including women, rural and remote populations, Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, and communities with low or no access to education.

- **Early warning systems don't yet reach everyone who needs them.** When extreme events like floods and cyclones hit, warnings save lives - if people can access them. Yet early warning systems still largely use cell-broadcasted written messages in national languages, excluding anyone who can't read, access a phone, or speak that language.

- **Local communicators are rarely equipped to understand and share climate information** like weather predictions and preparedness measures across languages. Organizations and media outlets often lack data on the language diversity of their audiences to know which languages to prioritize. They may be expected to sight-translate with no support, risking inconsistency and mistranslation.

- Climate conversations use complex terminology developed in English for discussion among specialists. **Terms are hard or impossible to translate clearly, and do not match how people talk about the environment in their own languages.** Without a systematic approach to translating terminology, hazard and risk knowledge does not translate to action, and people cannot communicate effectively with organizations and authorities.

- Communities at the forefront of climate change already know how their land, water, livestock and natural resources are being impacted, but **language barriers often lock this expertise out of climate conversations.** Minoritized communities cannot share these observations or their land management expertise for climate mitigation and conservation. Indigenous communities' priorities for their land go unheard. Effective, sustainable and contextually relevant planning must bring those most affected into decision-making.

Mapping language and telecommunications data alongside flood risk in Pakistan supports responders to plan effective communication before the next disaster strikes.

Developing technology that supported automatic speech recognition in Hindi made information on adaptive farming methods more accessible to farmers already dealing with climate change.

Assessing language and communication preferences helped us work with partners to involve Rohingya community members in cyclone early warning systems in Cox's Bazar.

Do you want to support climate action for everyone, whatever their language? Here's how CLEAR Global can help:

Providing **language services** like translation and voiceover so your information is in formats and languages that work for the people who need it.

Assessing the language and communication needs and preferences of communities you work with so you can plan the most impactful communication strategy.

Using that data to develop **communication planning tools** like language maps.

Testing climate-related **terminology** to develop multilingual glossaries that ensure consistent, clear, accurate communication using words people are familiar with.

Helping build **language technology** like automatic speech recognition in marginalized languages to hear from those most at risk of disasters.

Testing communication materials with different language groups to see how language barriers may exclude the people you're trying to reach.

Training on translation, humanitarian interpreting, plain language, and communication in emergencies, to support teams to better manage language challenges.

For more information, visit clearglobal.org or contact us at info@clearglobal.org