LANGUAGE FACTSHEET FOR PROTECTION STAFF

Language resource guide

Protection programming is aimed at obtaining the full right of the affected people. Protection of civilians is always necessary and is the responsibility of the States. In times of armed conflict or violent insecurity, post-conflict situations, protracted social conflict and natural disasters. The states are often unable/unwilling to protect civilians. Furthermore, individual's support network and community coping mechanisms may be weakened, exposing people to much greater risks. If the state is unable or unwilling to protect rights, perpetrators of violence within the family, social network and community may be able to abuse without fear of punishment. Emergencies and displacement can also increase frustration and violence within families, communities and between social groups. This is often directed at the most vulnerable weakening their capacity even further. In protection monitoring and assessment, humanitarian aid workers tend to consider poverty, age, gender and disability as drivers of vulnerability, while language falls under the lost category of "others".

Language and vulnerability are so much interwoven. Marginalized language speakers are faced with multiple challenges ranging from stigmatization, denial, deprivation and coercion, thereby leaving them more vulnerable in times of conflict, illness and disaster. As a result, they are often in need of protection. They are also some of the hardest groups of people to reach in terms of support and assistance.

Protection actors therefore aim at improving the safety of affected people by:

i.   Reducing the amount of threat

This can be achieved through protection monitoring, advocacy for protection, protection by presence, civil society capacity building for protection

ii.   Reducing the level of vulnerability

This is possible through careful disseminating information, case management, child Protection, legal aid & counselling, support community self-protection mechanisms, mental health & psychosocial support, etc.

iii.   Reducing the amount of time exposed to the risk

The above cannot be achieved without taking language into account. Humanitarian aid workers find it difficult to accurately know the number of language(s) spoken in the community.

TRANSLATORS WITHOUT BORDERS

Below are some of the language related challenges humanitarian aid workers face and recommendations:

1. **Lack of verifiable and updated dataset for languages**. Humanitarian organizations do not routinely collect data on the languages of crisis-affected people - and when they do, it is rarely circulated. Without language information, operational staff/organizations are often allowed to assume the languages people speak and understand.

   This can be overcome by consulting existing data on the languages people speak in the crisis-affected areas, collected through assessments and research that have been previously conducted. These resources include:
   - TWB, Northeast Nigeria Language Map, by Local Government Area
   - TWB, Northeast Nigeria Language Map, by primary language
   - TWB, Communications Dashboard: Internally Displaced People in Northeast Nigeria, by IDP site
   - TWB, Four simple language questions for needs assessments and surveys
   - TWB, MSNA language data can help humanitarians communicate better with affected people

2. Most of the staff involved in **case management and protection monitoring** are predominantly English and Hausa speakers, thus experiencing challenges when communicating in other local languages. The staff then employ the services of a community member for translation resulting in a variety of Information lost in translation ranging from confidentiality lost, community tensions amplified, messages skewed by power dynamics, vulnerability exacerbated, etc.

   The possible recommendation is adequate use of available language data to identify skills required and provide guidance and training to bilingual staff that support in translation and interpretation.

3. **Complex terminology** challenges are another constraint when providing protection services like case management. There are no words in some local languages for some technical humanitarian terminologies, even if there is, sometimes these words carry stigma and might not be appropriate. In some cases, some topics are very sensitive, and the affected population might not feel comfortable discussing using some words but rather prefer using euphemism. Others use abbreviations or acronyms which further mislead affected people.

   These challenges can be mitigated if some key words can be translated in local language prior to interacting with the community. The use of TWB Glossary for Northeast Nigeria, TWB COVID-19 Glossary and TWB, COVID-19 or Korona Bairos? Communicating on the "disease that affects your breathing" in northeast Nigeria will help solve some if not all the terminology challenges.

Figure 1

Figure 1 above shows a woman from a minority language beaten by some persons in the community because she had a misunderstanding with another woman from the majority language. Photo credit: Joseph Isuwa

For more information about this study or to find out how Translators without Borders is supporting humanitarian action in northeast Nigeria, visit our website or contact: nigeria@translatorswithoutborders.org