In need of words: using local languages improves comprehension for people affected by Cyclone Idai in Beira, Mozambique

People affected by Cyclone Idai need information and a voice as much as shelter and food. In April 2019, Translators without Borders asked people displaced in Beira, Mozambique about their language and information needs. This is what we found out from the people we spoke with:

▶ **33%** either do not have, or are not sure they have, enough information about humanitarian services.

▶ People living in temporary relocation sites in Beira speak **17** languages. Sena, Ndau, and Chwabo are the most widely used.

▶ **44%** of women do not understand spoken Portuguese.

▶ **65%** of women of all ages and **57%** of people of both sexes over the age of **50** do not understand written information in any language.

▶ The vast majority of affected people surveyed prefer to receive information in audio form. Posters and leaflets to take home are the preferred channels for written information.

> Respondents voiced frustration about how difficult it was to communicate:
> *"I think it would be better if we had a tent where we could put our suggestions and even complaints. Because then they would understand the things we like and those we do not like. Now we are like a dog in captivity that only does what the owner wants."*
> *– Male resident of Picoco camp*

Eight ways to communicate more effectively after Cyclone Idai:

1. Understand the communication needs and preferences of affected people.
2. Prioritize audio messaging in local languages.
3. Ensure that the information you share is consistent and timely to limit fear and hopelessness.
4. Urgently set up confidential and language-appropriate feedback mechanisms.
5. Develop graphics-heavy materials, and field-test them, disaggregating by mother tongue, gender, and age.
6. Use glossaries to ensure consistent and accurate communication.
7. Train field staff on the importance of language and the basics of humanitarian interpreting.
8. Consider language as a factor of vulnerability.

Read the full report **here**.

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