



**TRANSLATORS**  
WITHOUT BORDERS

# HOW TO TALK ABOUT HEALTH

LANGUAGE GUIDE FOR HEALTH COMMUNICATORS

*This document is for health communicators working in health interventions. It is based on the testimonies and lessons learned from health communicators consulted by TWB.*

DIFFERENTS CONCEPTS EN LANGUE LOCALE				
CONCEPTS (Français)	Swahili	Kinande	MaShi	Autre (ingine)
Maladie		OBUKONI	ndwala	#makoni
Vaccin			endugi	
Signes		ECHIMINJI-KALO		
Consentement		ERYANZI		
		OBUBAL		
		Mwafurika		
		WASINGI		



## *Why is language important?*

People speak different languages, it is important that they receive information in a language which they feel comfortable with, and that they can express their needs and concerns. Misunderstandings and poor communications can lead to rumors and confusion. It makes your job more difficult, and puts communities at risk. Clear information in the right language helps build trust, allowing you to do your job better and for the community to get the help they need.

## *Speak the preferred language of those you are talking to*

To be understood, you must use the preferred language of those you are speaking to in the community. The best way to find out which language they prefer is to ask them from the start.

When working in the field, you can:

- Ask what language people prefer to speak and try to facilitate that. Record the requirements so that you can later provide them with information in a more appropriate language if you are unable to meet their preferences correctly at that time.
- Consider ways to provide information in the language preferred by the community to complement the spoken information you have shared. Share printed information or tell them how to find more information in their preferred language (for example, radio, television, telephone hotlines).

CONCEPTS (français)	Swahili	Kinande	MaShi	Autre (ingine)
Maladie	Malali/ Magonjwa	<del>OBUKONI</del>	ndwala	<del>#makoni</del>
Vaccin	chango		enduzi	
Signes	Alama	<del>TECHIMINJI- KALO</del>	ghalama	
Consentement	Utashi	ERYANZA	Ku Lonza	ishasha
Soins	Matuzo	<del>OBUBALYA</del>	KUBUKWA	NBUSHAKE
		MWABUKIRE	Asinge	<del>#wakigere</del>
		WASINGJA	<del>Mwanzi</del> michi Koko	Wamekola wakolire

**Use words that are easy to understand and respectful of patients and their loved ones**

In addition to choosing which language to speak in, it is necessary to decide which words to use. Choosing the wrong word can lead to offense, confusion, mistrust and poor communication.

- Certain terms commonly used to speak of illness arouse fear, because they are considered to be too raw or associated with death. isolation - community resistance. Prefer less violent alternatives or explanations.
- Others are confusing because they are unknown or too technical; sometimes they are words and expressions in French or English, or acronyms. PPE - community death - triage. Prefer alternatives or explanations that are clearer and easier to understand.
- Others are seen as denigrating or stigmatizing the patient or their loved ones. suspect case - contact of contacts - case of contact. Prefer more humane and respectful alternatives or explanations.

Term to avoid	Suggested terms*	Lingala	Congolese Swahili	Nande
ETC	ebola treatment centre	bilamba ya ba minginga pona ko batela na bokono	mavazi ya kinga ya kujikinga kwa ugonjwa	esyongimba syabanganga okwikariryabo nobulwere bw'ebola
PPE	medical clothing and equipment which protects against the illness	moto abiki na na liwa	aliye pona	oyulialama
case	person with an illness	mobeli ou moto ya bokono	mgonjwa	omukoni oyuwabiriminywa kwa kwire obulwere
contact case	person who should be tested because they have been physically close to a person with the illness	moto oyo esengeli asala examen pamba te azalaki pembeni to mpe asimbaki moto ya bokono	mtu ambaye anapashwa kupimwa kwasababu aligusa wala alikaribiana ugonjwa	oyulya tula kutse oyulyabya hakuhi n'omulwere, kutsi hakuhi na maghetsi wossi wossi awakalwa omo mubiri w'omundu oyu
suspect case	person with signs of an illness, but this diagnosis must be confirmed by a laboratory test	moto oyo azali ko bela mpe azali na bilembo ya bokono, kasi esengeli ko sala test na laboratoire pona ko confirmer bilembo ya bokono wana	mtu ambaye anaonesha halama (dalili) ya ugonjwa, alikini inaomba kuhakikishwa kisho majibu ya kipimo	oyukatikatikaw'eribya inyabiri himbikwa
contact of contacts	person who was physically close to others who were physically close to a person with the illness	moto oyo azali pembeni ya moto mosusu oyo azalaki pembeni to mpe en contact na moto ya bokono	mtu wa karibu na mugonjwa	oyulya yi tulaya oko yulya tul'okomukoni, kutse oko maghetse omomubiri wiwe
community death	death of a person with the illness in a place other than the treatment centre	liwa ya moto ya bokono oyo akufi libanda ya centre ya traitement	mutu mwenyi hakukufia kwenyi kituo ya matunzo	oyukaholera ahate kilamiro kyasibwe n'obutabali
isolation	physical separation of a person with the illness from other people to avoid spreading the illness	ko tia moto ya bokono musika ya bato misusu na tina ya ko eviter ko panzana ya bokono	tengo la mtu mgonjwa na wengine watu kwa kuepuka kusambaza ugonjwa	Eri kingirabakoni bakasya sighaliranaya obulwere
resistance	mistrust	kozanga ko ndima	ukosefu wa uaminifu	obuniyi
triage	patient monitoring to check for signs of illness	bolandeli batu ya bokoni pona ko tala bilembo ya bokono	uchunguzi wa wagonjwa kwa kutambua halama za ugonjwa	emísómbolere

\*you can find a more complete list in TWB glossary

Prepare well for interactions in the field. Consistent use of words is preferable. This means that people receive the same information. In order to find the most appropriate way to explain yourself, you can:

- Make sure you understand the meaning of the words and how to translate them into the relevant languages. Speak to your team leader if you are unsure.
- Refer to the TWB glossary for the Democratic Republic of Congo. There you will find the suggested language and terms to use.
- Discuss with your team members how they translate or explain difficult concepts. Agree with them on the versions that you find most precise, clear and appropriate.
- Consult with communications teams from other organizations in your area to agree on the best translations and explanations.

## *Speak with respect*

Illnesses and talking about health can scare people. They may be confused and need support. Make sure they feel comfortable talking to you and asking questions. Speak politely, don't be discouraged.

Respect is essential for information to be well received. Consultations indicate that:

- People are more trusting of information provided by someone they know and trust.
- Face-to-face communication is important, especially for women, because it is often women who take care of the sick and accompany them to health centers.
- Respect for others is shown by speaking their language and choosing appropriate words, as explained above. It's not respectful to talk to people condescendingly or to talk to them like they are lower than others.
- Talk about the diagnosis or symptoms of a particular person to them directly, sensitively and without others hearing.
- It is important to be aware of subjects which are sensitive for people to talk about and talk about them appropriately and carefully.

If you don't know the answer to a question:

- It is better to admit it than to give incorrect information.
- Assure the person asking that you will get back to them with the correct answer, and make sure you do.
- You can tell people where they can find more information.





## About TWB

Translators without Borders (TWB) is a non-profit organization offering language and translation support for humanitarian and development agencies, and other non-profit organizations on a global scale. Translators without Borders believes that everyone has the right to give and receive information in a language and format they understand. We work with nonprofit partners and a global community of language professionals to build local language translation capacity, and raise awareness of language barriers.

TWB has been researching language barriers in health responses in DRC since early 2019. We supported the response to the 10th Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC, as well as the response to the 11th Ebola outbreak in Equateur province, and the COVID-19 pandemic response.

**For further information on the importance of language in the DRC response to health crises, visit our [webpage](#). Contact [DRC@translatorswithoutborders.org](mailto:DRC@translatorswithoutborders.org) to find out more.**