



TRANSLATORS
WITHOUT BORDERS

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK MECHANISMS AND LANGUAGE

Key considerations for humanitarian organizations in the
Democratic Republic of Congo



Case Study: Lessons learned from the Ebola response in Equateur (2020)

- Information, including information about feedback and reporting mechanisms, needed to be in local languages.
- Communities valued the opportunity to speak face to face with people who speak their own language (notably Mongo, Kitwa, Lotomba, Ngombe), understand the context, and could communicate concepts appropriately.
- Vulnerable groups felt even more vulnerable due to language and communication barriers. This included indigenous communities and women.
- Communities did not know how to report and did not have information about whether they could report in their language.
- Organizations lacked information about the language feedback was collected in, recorded, and analyzed. It is likely that languages are being used inconsistently at different stages of collection and analysis. This inconsistent switching between languages hampered accurate translation and led to miscommunication or misunderstanding.

- Feedback mechanisms relied heavily on French as the language of reporting, recording and responding, with some access for other official languages (notably Lingala). This excluded local language speakers from giving feedback.
- In areas with poor communication infrastructure, information access depended on the choice of communication channel. Lack of access to telephones and network coverage complicated access to hotlines. Many community members preferred face-to-face communication and audiovisual information.
- Responding organizations relied heavily on local staff to bridge the communication gap, but staff said they were not equipped to communicate about complex technical subjects in local languages. They reported a lack of translated materials in local languages, pictorial and audiovisual communication tools, training, and support with translation of complex concepts from and into local languages.
- Very little provision was made for survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse to report in local languages - a significant barrier to reporting and accessing support.

Questions to ask about language and communication when setting up a community feedback mechanism.

Questions for members of the community

1. What languages do members of the community speak?
2. Are certain languages preferred or to be avoided? (For example: international languages like French or English, certain languages only community leaders speak?)
3. What channels and formats do people already receive and share information in? What channels and formats do people prefer to receive and share information in?
4. What are the social and linguistic norms when talking about complex or sensitive topics? How do these sensitivities differ between gender and age groups? (For example: sexual exploitation and abuse, child protection, feedback, accountability, fraud)

Questions for your organization

1. What languages do your staff speak? Do they speak locally preferred languages? Does your team include both male and female speakers of preferred languages?
2. What languages and formats will users be able to record feedback in?
3. What is your capacity for transcription of feedback in the user's language?
4. What is your capacity for translation from the user's language into the operational language of your organization?
5. Does your team have the capacity to respond to feedback and explain actions taken in local languages?

For more information about language in Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Safeguarding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, visit the TWB website

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